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ALGERNON ~~CHARLES~~ SWINBURNE

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closing in a lamentable graduation of collapse. And now that we have before us in full—in all reasonable or desirable completeness—the great man's own record of his troubles, his emotions, and his toils, we find it, from the opening to the close, a record not only of dauntless endurance but of elastic and joyous heroism—of life indomitable to the last—of a spirit and an intellect that no trials could impair and no sufferings could degrade. It is no longer pity that any one may presume to feel for him at the lowest ebb of his fortunes or his life; it is rapture of sympathy, admiration, and applause. 'This was a man!' And Lockhart did not show us—would not let us see—what a man of men this was. But now that we know, we may say with Milton's Manoa, 'Nothing is here for tears.' The very last days of all, as recorded by Lockhart, are painful indeed to read of, but not painfuller than would be the record of any other gradual and conscious decline and subsidence of spirit and body, overworked and overworn, towards the common end—'no rest for Sir Walter but in the grave.' All that, grievous and even harrowing as it is to a young reader on his first reading, is merely deathbed exhaustion: and deathbed exhaustion is no more important, significant, or worthy to be taken into account than deathbed conversion. What a man was while he could stand, speak, and write, is matter of interest and importance to those who care to know anything about him: when he cannot, it may be assumed that he can no longer think for himself—and that if (for instance) he belies his whole life by submission to a creed for which, while sound and strong in mind and body, his contemptuous disgust was wont to



exhaust the whole vocabulary of scorn, it is not the living man but the breathing corpse that is received into the pale of conversion. And what Sir Walter was while he could put pen to paper we now can judge for ourselves. Kind and true, brave and wise, single-minded and gentle-hearted, he is himself alone—as surely as ever was Shakespeare's Richard, though scarcely after the same fashion. And he is himself to the very last line of this Journal. The most rigid agnostic might relax into thanksgiving for the revelation of so comfortable a fact as is revealed by Scott's own record of his visit to Italy—the fact that he was still capable of such appreciation and such enjoyment as Lockhart had made us think all but impossible for him; that Malta, Naples, and other landing-places, were still interesting and delightful to his hard-worked but yet unwearied and indefatigable intelligence. As far as good spirits and good humour are concerned, the very last entries in this Journal might have been set down by a young fellow, high in heart and health, on his first holiday excursion across the continent.<sup>1</sup> On the 16th of April the pen slipped from his hand: five months and five days later 'his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes.' It was not so long a period of decrepitude and decay that any man need now make moan over it.

A life more full of happy activity and of active happiness was surely never allotted to any man on earth. While he could write at all, he could usually write well; if not always worthily of his genius at its

<sup>1</sup> A word has been dropped out of the printed text, which appears in the reproduction from the MS. of these closing lines. Compare vol. ii. p. 481 with vol. i. p. vi. (Preface).

best, yet seldom altogether unworthily of it. No more stupid and beetle-headed falsehood, ever crawled into hearing and hardened into tradition than that which has condemned his last works to compassionate oblivion or contempt. One only—*Castle Dangerous*—shows anything like a serious or positive sign of decay; and it can hardly be called worse than another abortive story, *The Betrothed*, which had preceded it by six years, and had been succeeded by such admirable work as the *Chronicles of the Canongate*—which, be it remembered, include not only *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *The Surgeon's Daughter*, but those two masterpieces of tragedy in miniature, *The Two Drovers* and *The Highland Widow*. If these be tokens of impotence and decrepitude, Heaven send us such another decrepit and impotent man of genius to beat his stalwart and competent supplanters out of the field! There will be many Jameses—nay, there will be many Hawthornes—ere such another Scott. There will be many Scotts—let this also be granted—before we see another Shakespeare. A flatterer of Scott while alive and a backbiter of Scott when dead has held up to no unreasonable or unjust derision the monstrous absurdity of adulation which would set the author of *Waverley* beside the author of *Othello*—an absurdity, we must remember, derided by no man more scornfully than by Scott.<sup>1</sup> Truth is truth, though it be a Carlyle or a Gladstone, a Pigott or a Parnell, who affirms it: our astonishment at the fact must not be permitted to impair our recognition of its existence. But it is also true that if there were or

<sup>1</sup> 'The blockheads talk of my being like Shakespeare—not fit to tie his brogues.'—*Journal*, Dec. 11, 1826, vol. i. p. 321.

could be any man whom it would not be a monstrous absurdity to compare with Shakespeare as a creator of men and an inventor of circumstance, that man could be none other than Scott. Let any true lover of his work run over in his own mind the number of living figures which stand out on the background of his memory as creatures of the author of *Marmion* and *Rokeby*: let us keep to the poetical or metrical fictions, faulty and clumsy and conventional in execution as they may sometimes be or as they too often are. Where, since the age of Shakespeare died out and faded into the generation of Shirley, shall we find in any other than satirical poetry a figure as living as William of Deloraine or as Bertram Risingham? *Marmion* and *Roderick Dhu* are more theatrical, it may be, and less convincing to the adult mind than these; but how infinitely more credible, actual, and interesting than any heroes of poetic narrative or protagonists of poetic action who have since arisen to compete with them! As to the novels, it would need the indefatigable as well as inspired hand of Victor Hugo to attempt a catalogue of the living and everliving figures comprised in the muster-roll of their characters. In his noble book on Shakespeare the greatest writer of a great age has paid untranslatable tribute to the inexhaustible fecundity of his predecessor's genius. His words would need only a change in the proper names to be no less applicable to Scott's. From Bradwardine to Redgauntlet and onwards, what a chain of heroes!—from Meg Merrilies to Wandering Willie, what a kinship of living and superb and adorable vagrants!—from Abel Sampson to Gideon Gray, what a sequence of homely and noble

and lovable figures, grave or grotesque externally, internally kind and true as the heart, and the genius of their creator! It would require a volume, and not a small volume, to enumerate only the more notable and the more memorable of the immortals whose friendship Scott has bequeathed to us for the date of our mortal life.

This is the man whose private journal now lies at last before us. 'Thank heaven,' somebody said once, 'we know nothing about Shakespeare.' 'Thank God,' any reader of this diary may say, 'we know all about Scott.' But this knowledge brings him so near to us that we feel it almost as difficult as his nearest friends must evidently have felt it to express the impression or translate the emotion it produces or excites.

The crowning charm of Sir Walter's Journal is this: that it is not by any means what he meant it to be when he began it by registering his lifelong regret that he had not kept a regular journal. A more irregular and desultory record was never kept: and this fact must serve at once as explanation and as excuse for the desultory and irregular style of review which may perhaps be the only one appropriate. To begin at the beginning and grind your way through to the close would be the surest receipt for failure in giving any conception of the quality which makes it priceless. 'No, sir; do you read books through?' At all events, though there is nothing (how should there be anything?) to skip, it seems to me that the fittest form of introduction or of comment must be the humble and homely method of selecting and designating, here by choice and there by chance, some few of such passages as may

seem more than usually significant of the noble nature and the noble genius now finally revealed for our thankful admiration and our loyal love. For instance, if we began at the beginning, it would be painful to remark and impossible to avoid remarking on the offensive reference to the noble poet of the *Scpolcri* and the illustrious scholar whose unfinished edition of Dante had the supreme good fortune and the transcendent honour of continuation and completion by the hand of Giuseppe Mazzini. This insultingly reckless and savagely stupid example of headlong and brainless insularity is less inexplicable and scarcely more lamentable than the immoral and perverse infatuation which made Scott speak of one of the basest and shamefullest slanders that ever dropped from the lying lips of Byron as a mere sample of his 'love of mystifying; which indeed may be referred to that of mischief.' It is hard to understand how so honest and loyal a man should ever have had two weights and two measures for the conduct of others; but in this and another too memorable instance, that lenient reference to Charles II.'s treatment of Lord Mulgrave which so justly horrified and disgusted Leigh Hunt, it is but too evident that he had. The fact must be admitted and dismissed. But where to choose first among the passages noted on a first reading as especially illustrative of the man so loved and so revered, whom now we find worthier than even we had ever held him worthy of reverence and of love, is a riddle which can only be solved at random. And by chance if not by choice I begin with a passage which may haply suggest an inadequate apology, an insufficient excuse, for the manifest and manifold short-

omings of this tribute to a great man whose avowal of infirmity reassures me by the revelation of kinship on the weaker side. 'I think,' he writes on the thirteenth day from the beginning, 'this journal will suit me well. If I can coax myself into an idea that it is purely voluntary, it may go on. . . . But never a being, from my infancy upwards, hated task-work as I hate it. . . . It is not that I am idle in my nature neither. But propose to me to do one thing, and it is inconceivable the desire I have to do something else—not that it is more easy or more pleasant, but just because it is escaping from an imposed task. I cannot trace this love of contradiction to any distinct source, but it has haunted me all my life. I could almost suppose it was mechanical, and that the imposition of a piece of duty-labour operated on me like the mace of a bad billiard-player, which gives an impulse to the ball indeed, but sends it off at a tangent different from the course designed by the player.'

It will be a comfort too for other unfortunates to recognize 'one more unfortunate' in the writer of this entry:—'I cannot conceive what possesses me, over every person besides, to mislay papers. I received a letter Saturday at *c'en*, enclosing a bill for 750*l.*; *no deaf mutes*. Well, I read it, and note the contents; and this day, as if it had been a wind-bill in the literal sense of the words, I search everywhere, and lose three hours of my morning—turn over all my confusion in the writing-desk—break open one or two letters, lest I should have enclosed the sweet and quickly convertible document in them—send for a joiner, and disorganize my scrutoire, lest it should have fallen aside by mistake.

I find it at last—the place where is of little consequence ; but this trick must be amended.'

'Thou seest,' says the old Duke to Jaques, 'we are not all alone unhappy.' But who would have thought it of Sir Walter?

'Rodrigue, qui l'eût cru?' 'Chimène, qui l'eût dit?'

Thus far, I hardly need say, my excerpts from the Journal will be found in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*; but on February 6th, 1826, an entry was made which will not be found there.

'Obliged to borrow 240*l.*, to be refunded in spring, from John Gibson, to pay my nephew's outfit and passage to Bombay. I wish I could have got this money otherwise, but I must not let the orphan boy, and such a clever fellow, miscarry through my fault. His education, &c., has been at my expense ever since he came from America.'

It really would seem that, 'whatever record leap to light,' this best of great men and greatest of good men—saving, at the outside, one or two among them all—is sure to appear the nobler and the kindlier. 'Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus' when writing in praise of him? But that we must not try to do—or rather we must try not to attempt it. And yet it is impossible to abstain from reference to the charity lavished on an 'Orkney laird' and his muddle-headed mother in the thickest turmoil of his own affairs: the reflection which follows on an entry registering a loan of 300*l.* on a doubtful security is as characteristic as any in the book. 'I have no connection with the family except that of compassion, and may not be rewarded even by thanks

when the young man comes of age. I have known my father often so treated by those whom he had laboured to serve. But if we do not run some hazard in our attempts to do good, where is the merit of them? So I will bring through my Orkney laird if I can.'

And what splendour of good sense shines out in the entry of December 6th, on the folly of parents who would force all youngsters into the same 'groove—and what rational and compassionate humour in the description of a 'good-natured lad,' who, 'after fighting two regular boxing-matches and a duel with pistols in the course of one week, tells' his friends 'roundly he will be no writer, which common sense might have told them before.' But citation from the excerpts given by Lockhart and familiar to all civilized humanity would seem superfluous, if Lockhart's own organ, the egregious and incomparable *Quarterly Review*, had not taken advantage of this publication to display in full exposure the utter nudity of its ignorance with regard to a biography unfamiliar to its contributors alone; if the same invaluable organ of Gothamite politics and Gothamite criticism which regretted that Scott's first and best novels were disfigured by 'dark dialogues of Angiified Erse'—I quote from memory; it might as well have been 'of Germanized Slavonic' or 'of Russified Chinese'—had not revealed the fact that Lockhart's *Life of Scott* is in the main an unknown book, an undiscovered apocalypse, an unrealized entity, to the present conductors of Lockhart's *Review*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This must appear so incredible that it may be worth while to cite evidence in proof of it. 'In his journal,' says the *Quarterly Review* for October 1890 (No. 342, vol. clxxi. p. 390), 'he wrote the following



One of Scott's best and keenest touches of criticism was suggested by 'a touch of the *morbus eruditorum*,' as he calls an affection of the nerves and mind, the heart and the reins—which perhaps he did wrong, but most nobly wrong, to resist so gallantly; to 'give battle in form, by letting both mind and body know that, supposing one the House of Commons and the other the House of Peers, my will is sovereign over both.' There is, as he says, 'a good description of this species of mental weakness in Fletcher's<sup>1</sup> fine play of *The Lover's Progress*.' His further remarks on the singularly original and successful treatment of supernatural effect in that equally romantic and realistic tragedy are exactly and admirably just. There is indeed in this scene of Fletcher's a singular anticipation of the method and the object of so dissimilar a writer as Defoe. And here rather than elsewhere we may observe a no less notable entry of all but eight months later. 'A sort of bouncing

passage on the same subject, which Lockhart did not publish.' In the fourth chapter of Lockhart's *Life* (p. 35, ed. 1845) the greater part of the passage will be found—line by line and word for word.

'On the 22nd of November, 1825,' says the Reviewer, 'he gives this unpublished anecdote,' which every one else has read—and remembered—in the ninth chapter (p. 81) of Lockhart's *Life*. We need look no further; though such research would not be unrewarded. 'I hope here be proofs.'

In the same number of the *Quarterly Review* I find as perfect an example of erudition and accuracy as ever perhaps embellished its pages. Chaucer's 'Sir Thopas' (we learn from a passage to be found on page 455) 'begins to tell a rhyme which he had learned in days gone by.' Readers of the *Canterbury Tales* have hitherto laboured under the delusion that Chaucer himself began to recite the metrical romance of Sir Thopas, and was pulled up short by the Host; who expressed an opinion that his 'drafty riming' was not worth—shall we say, the brain-stuff of a *Quarterly Reviewer*?

<sup>1</sup> Not 'Beaumont and Fletcher's': his scholarship was at fault there.

tragedy,' to which I cannot tell whether the critic was or was not less than just when he described it as 'worthless in the extreme,' was yet, in his opinion, 'like many of the plays of the seventeenth century, written to a good tune'—a phrase of perfect and precise felicity. 'The dramatic poets of that time seem to have possessed as joint-stock a highly poetical and abstract tone of language, so that the worst of them often remind you of the very best. The audience must have had a much stronger sense of poetry in those days than now, since language was received and applauded at the Fortune or the Red Bull which would not now be understood by any general audience in Great Britain. This leads far.'

It does; and among other things it justifies and explains the deep and serious interest which all competent readers take in the exploration of the obscurest corners, in the study of the humblest byways, through which the investigation of Shakespeare's art in Shakespeare's age may lead them.

And such a note as this should remind us how much there is in the work and in the character of Scott which would suffice to make the memory of a lesser man respectable, but is naturally overshadowed, if not darkened, by the lustre of his greater gifts and his nobler qualities. The leavings, the scrapings, the parings of his genius and his intelligence would suffice to equip a dozen students or critics of the unproductive sort. And it is simply because they are Scott's that such a dramatic poem as *Auchindrane* and such a historical romance as *Count Robert of Paris* are forgotten or ignored. Bertram Rivingham has eclipsed John Mure, as Ivanhoe has eclipsed Count Robert. Anna

Comnena and her recreant husband are sketches as humorously and, as seriously lifelike as any in the more popular but hardly more admirable *Talisman*; and the cynic Agelastes is a more original and less theatrical villain than Conrad of Montserrat. But perhaps it may not seem wonderful that even the biographer whose devotion was so scornfully derided by Carlyle should once and again have been a little less than just to the lesser works of Scott, when we consider how strangely incapable was Scott himself of appreciating aright his own best and most precious work.

'The air of "Bonnie Dundee" running in my head to-day, I [wrote] a few verses to it before dinner, taking the key-note from the story of Clavers leaving the Scottish Convention of Estates in 1688-9. I wonder if they are good' (!!). 'Ah! poor Will Erskine! thou couldst and wouldst have told me. I must consult J. B.' (!!!)

This was the note entered in the author's diary after writing the very finest song of its noble kind—a fighting ballad with a fighting burden—that ever was or ever will be written: a song with the sound of trumpets or the beat of hoofs or the clash of steel in every deathless line of it. 'Le poète inconscient a sans doute les défauts de ses qualités: il a aussi les qualités de ses défauts.' Had Scott been less uncritical of himself—a better and a worthier judge of his own strength and weakness—we might possibly have had neither this glorious poem nor these amazing remarks on it. And yet it is a sign of weakness rather than of strength, of incompetence rather than of competence, that a great workman should be as blind as the smallest of critics, as deaf as the dumbest of reviewers, to the glory and the harmony of his very

best work. It is better, no doubt, that he should under-

## THE JOURNAL OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

1825—1832.

IF there is one thing of which a reasonable man might have felt reasonably confident, it is that nothing could heighten the admiration or deepen the affection felt by him for the name and the memory of Sir Walter Scott. It would have seemed, till now, as possible that some new revelation or discovery should intensify the wonder and the worship which the world pays in tribute to the genius of Shakespeare. But this impossibility has come palpably to pass : and the year 1890 must ever be remembered in the history of letters as 'Scott's year'—if I may borrow from the turf a phrase to which one who loved horses so wisely and so well would certainly not have objected. The too long delayed publication of his Journal is in every way an almost priceless benefit ; but as a final illustration and attestation of a character almost incomparably lovable, admirable, and noble, it is a gift altogether beyond price. When we are disheartened and disgusted by the woful revelations of such abject unmanliness and disloyalty as dishonour and degrade the memories of poets so much as Scott as were Coleridge and Keats, we can

earliest reading years. No one ever doubted that Tennyson's noble praise of Wellington must be no less applicable to Scott; that, whatever record might leap to light, he never would be shamed; that upon his brow shame would be ashamed to sit. The more we know of Byron and Bonaparte, the lower do they lie in the estimate of sane and honest men; the more we know of the loyal man of war and the loyal man of letters, the higher do they stand and the clearer do they shine. The very weaknesses revealed in Scott's commercial relations, in Wellington's correspondence with a speculative and saintly maiden of apostolic but ambitious piety, excite no harsher or unkindlier feeling than such regret as cannot reasonably temper our admiration with any serious infusion of sorrow or of blame.

It is difficult to understand on what principle the passages given from this Journal in the *Life of Scott* were selected by a biographer whose loyal affection for his illustrious father-in-law is at once beyond question and beyond praise. For the impression left by the perusal and reperusal of those most interesting and pathetic excerpts must surely have been most bitterly painful to any reader, boy or man, who loved and honoured Sir Walter as any man or boy worth his salt will always love and honour him. The crushing and grinding weight of miserable mischance was all, or almost all, that our sympathies were permitted or admitted to feel. Over all the close of a noble and glorious life there seemed to hang a dense and would be blind as the servants of critics, as deaf as the dumbest of reviewers, to the glory and the harmony of his very

from Tate as to the 'completion' of *King Lear*, from Condell or from Ducis as to the 'completion' of *Othello*. 'In the original conception, *and in the book as actually written and printed*' (what has become of this text?—if extant, all true lovers of Scott should unite to reclaim it), 'Miss Mowbray's mock marriage had not halted at the profaned ceremony of the church; and the delicate printer shrank from the idea of obtruding on the fastidious public the possibility' which alone could have preserved the story from the charge of absolute, monstrous, flagrant and strident impossibility. No wonder that Scott was at first inclined to make short work of this preposterous impertinence. 'You would never have quarrelled with it had the thing happened to a girl in gingham:—the silk petticoat can make little difference.' That 'after some pause the author very reluctantly consented to cancel and re-write about twenty-four pages, which was enough to obliterate the dreaded scandal, and in a similar degree, as he always persisted, to perplex and weaken the course of his narrative, and the dark effect of its catastrophe,' is a fact which bears woful and final evidence to his lack of due respect and serious regard for his art, his reputation, and himself. More than this; it proves him to have been most uncritically unconscious of the injury done to his heroine by reducing her conduct and her language to such a level of incoherence as can only be explained by the apparent aberrations of inexplicable imbecility. A woman unspotted in person as in mind who confesses to her brother that the most venomous of scandal-mongers 'cannot say worse of her than she deserves' must evidently be suffering from some more or less unspeakable form of

lunacy: and this would vitiate the whole pathos of a most pathetic and tragic situation. But Scott, unaccountable as it seems, evidently failed to realize how far superior is Clara Mowbray to all his other heroines of the same rank or class. The colourless and spiritless Lucy Ashton was so much his favourite that her inevitable immolation was consummated, as we know, with more reluctance and regret than the sacrifice of any other victim.

But that Scott was at times a good and even an excellent judge of his own work is evident from his estimate of a little masterpiece which failed to attract the noisy and contagious enthusiasm of immediate popularity. 'Wrote a good task this morning,' he observes on July 8. 'I may be mistaken; but I do think the tale of Elspat McTavish in my bettermost manner.' Is there a finer short story in the world—or a tragic poem as good and as brief? *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is more terrible, more corrosive and vitriolic in its power; but these are not the highest qualities of tragic invention. And if Scott had never written a line for publication—if this journal were simply the journal of a ruined gentleman, of Mr. Godfrey Bertram or Sir Arthur Wardour, the greater part of his diary would be but a little less interesting than it is. The deep devotion of loyalty so beautifully painted in Miss Edgeworth's first and finest story was matched and overmatched by the doglike and divine fidelity of a retainer whose death must surely have reminded Scott of *Castle Rackrent*—his old friend's creation of so many years before the date when the unpublished author of *Waverley* was encouraged by the assurance of his Ballantyne that his work was really now

and then as good as hers. 'Old Will Straiton, my man of wisdom and proverbs, also dead.—When he heard of my misfortunes, he went to bed, and said he would not rise again, and kept his word.' It is beautiful to read of, but not wonderful. And it heightens our sense of the privilege enjoyed by that most highly privileged of men whom Scott could designate as 'the only one among my numerous friends who can properly be termed *amicus curarum mearum*,' James Skene.

It is curious, if not inexplicable, that 'Lord Elgin's remembrances' of Bonaparte, entered by Scott in his diary of March 13, 1826, should have been omitted by Lockhart; who can hardly have been impelled by any regard for Napoleon to suppress the curious anecdote illustrative of the bandit's brutal and vile vulgarity. Few letters of Scott's, by the way, are more interesting than one here cited from the Duke of Wellington's *Despatches*, in which he remarks on 'Bonaparte's general practice, and that of his admirers'—the chivalrous and manful habit of 'denying all bravery and all wisdom to their enemies.' The loyalty, magnanimity, and unselfishness of the great nation to which the typical English vices of egotism, hypocrisy, and envy are so proverbially unknown are never more gracefully displayed than in the comments of Frenchmen on their enemies—unless indeed the lustre of these lofty qualities be yet more characteristically conspicuous in the dealings of Frenchmen with their friends.

An adequate notice of Sir Walter's Journal would be at least half as long as the Journal itself: the reviewer, however devoted to his task, must therefore curb his goodwill and content himself with a few references,



chosen as much by chance as by any less random process of selection from among numberless passages, on which any lover of Scott would naturally delight to dwell. For one instance; all the world remembers the divine anecdote of Uncle Toby and the fly: but what is that fiction to this fact?

'June 8 [1826]. Bilious and headache this morning. A dog howl'd all night and left me little sleep. Poor cur! I dare say he had his distresses, as I have mine.'

For another instance, it is pleasant to find Scott—not always, though the writer of many successful and admirable songs, a very delicate or appreciative critic of lyrical poetry—in accord with Leigh Hunt as to the value of Fletcher's 'unrivalled song in the *Nice Valour*.'

The manful good sense which seems naturally to accompany a manly tenderness of nature is patent in the entry next to that which records with such unutterable pathos the emotion of the seven days' widower. 'We speak freely of her whom we have lost, and mix her name with our ordinary conversation. This is the rule of nature. All primitive people speak of their dead, and I think virtuously and wisely.'

The new matter dated June 12 and 13 [1826] is of great and various interest. 'Ballantyne thinks well of the work' (the *Life of Napoleon*, then in steady though painful progress), 'but I shall [expect] inaccuracies. An it were to do again, I would get some one to look it over. But who could that some one be? Who is there left of human race that I could hold such close intimacy with? No one.' And the next day's entry is as quaint as this is pathetic.

The criticism (March 6, 1827) on an unsatisfactory

actor of Benedick—‘my favourite Benedick’—is almost worthy of Lamb himself for its keen and delicate accuracy of appreciation.

Anything about Scott’s dogs is always good reading, though Lockhart did not think this entry worth insertion.

‘Here is a little misfortune, for Spice left me, and we could not find her. As we had no servant with us on horseback, I was compelled to leave her to her fate, resolving to send in quest of her to-morrow morning. The keepers are my *bonos socios*, as the Host says in “The [Merry] Devil of Edmonton,” and would as soon shoot a child as a dog of mine. But there are scamps and traps, and I am almost ashamed to say how reluctantly I left the poor little terrier to its fate.

‘She came home to me, however, about an hour and a half after we were home, to my great delectation.’

It is sad to contrast this tenderness for a dog with such irreverence towards an infant as is displayed (April 10, 1828) in this disgraceful reflection on one of his grandchildren: ‘The baby is that species of dough which is called a fine baby. I care not for children till they care a little for me.’ After all, Scott was neither a Homer nor a Victor Hugo.

The note on what he calls ‘the sense of pre-existence’ may be compared with Lord Tennyson’s powerful and subtle treatment of the subject in one of his early sonnets.

There is a good new story of murder in the entry for March 10, 1828: but a more interesting novelty is this note on the Duke of Wellington (April 27):—

‘Dined at Croker’s in the Admiralty with the Duke

of Wellington, Huskisson, Wilmot Horton, and others, outs and ins. No politics, of course, and every man disguising serious thoughts with a light brow. The Duke alone seemed open, though not letting out a word. He is one of the few whose lips are worth watching. I heard him say to-day that the best troops would run now and then. He thought nothing of men running, he said, provided they came back again. In war he had always his reserves.'

Wellington's attraction for Scott is more explicable by a certain similarity or community of qualities between these two great men than is Nelson's for Wordsworth—which is perhaps on that very account the more interesting and memorable of the two.

The tribute of Scott to the character of Rogers would of itself suffice not only to confute and put to everlasting shame the dastardly and poisonous malignity of Byron's most foul and treacherous libel, but to efface all impression of the vulgar tradition which ignores or denies the amiable and kindly qualities of a man whose bitter wit was apparently as visible to all as his goodness was certainly apparent to some.

'At parting, Rogers gave me a gold-mounted pair of glasses, which I will not part with in a hurry. I really like Rogers, and have always found him most friendly.' (May 26, 1828.)

This passage would have recalled to my mind, had it ever been necessary to recall, the gracious and cordial kindness of Mr. Rogers to a small Etonian some twenty-four years later.

It is odd that Scott, who if not an ideal was a very passable editor, should have said of the most execrably

misedited book that ever (I should hope) disgraced the press—even of Hartshorne's *Metrical Romances*—‘the work is well edited.’ But the mixture or alternation of lazy negligence with strenuous industry which is occasionally noticeable in Scott's own editorial work may perhaps in some degree account for this monstrous misapplication of lenity or good nature.

Few readers of Lockhart can have overlooked or forgotten the remarkably characteristic entry of February 28, 1829; but, for a reason which will presently appear and approve itself as sufficient, the main part and the only important part of it shall here be transcribed.

‘I cannot get myself to feel at all anxious about the Catholic question. I cannot see the use of fighting about the platter when you have let them snatch the meat off it. I hold Popery to be such a mean and depraving superstition, that I am not sure I could have found myself liberal enough for voting the repeal of the penal laws as they existed before 1780. They must, and would, in course of time, have smothered Popery; and, I confess, I should have seen the old lady of Babylon's mouth stopped with pleasure. But now that you have taken the plaster off her mouth, and given her free respiration, I cannot see the sense of keeping up the irritation about the claim to sit in Parliament. Unopposed, the Catholic superstition may sink into dust, with all its absurd ritual and solemnities. Still it is an awful risk. The world is, in fact, as silly as ever, and a good competence of nonsense will always find believers. Animal magnetism, phrenology, &c., &c., have all had their believers, and why not Popery? Ecod! if they should begin to make Smithfield broils, I do not know

where many an honest Protestant could find courage enough to be carbonadoed. I should shrink from the thoughts of tar-barrels and gibbets, I am afraid, and make a very pusillanimous martyr. So I hope the Duke of Wellington will keep the horned beast well in hand, and not let her get her leg over the harrows.'

In the preface to the publication now under review we find the following short paragraph: 'There is no longer any reason why the Journal should not be published in its entirety, and, by the permission of the Hon. Mrs. Maxwell-Scott, it now appears exactly as Scott left it' (exactly as Scott left it: let these five words be noted, and borne in mind)—'but for the correction of obvious slips of the pen and the omission of some details chiefly of family and domestic interest.'

The whole of the passage above transcribed has been cancelled. The editor who erased it had not even the grace to indicate the omission by the last pitiful resource of asterisks—the final and inadequate fig-leaf with which modesty might have attempted to cover the nakedness of mendacity.

Now, as every reader must ask himself, what can any one expect to gain by the translucent treachery of such a transpicuous imposture? We know that when religion is in question we must not appeal to reason. We know that faith is above all restrictions of carnal honesty, all obligations of worldly honour. But who, in the name of Tartuffe, can imagine that his holy cause will be profitably served by tactics too densely disingenuous, too stolid in their audacity, for an Escobar or a Liguori? Everybody reads Lockhart—everybody, at least, who does not write for the *Quarterly Review*. 'Thou

shalt tell a lie and stick to it' was once, we are told, the schoolboy's eleventh commandment; but the dullest of dullards on the lowest seat of the lowest form can hardly have ever expected to save his skin by a lie which would have provoked its inevitable confutation in the very instant and by the very fact of its utterance. Such evidences of desperation in decay must naturally provoke, in all but the most bilious of pessimists, a trust, a faith, a confidence that the happy day of righteous doom is drawing steadily nearer

Où l'on se servira des entrailles du pape,  
À défaut d'un cordon, pour étrangler Calvin.

March 23, 1829, is a day to be thankfully and joyfully remembered by all lovers of Johnson, of Boswell, and of Scott. On that day, says the Journal, 'I kept my state till one, and wrote notes to Croker upon Boswell's Scottish tour. It was an act of friendship, for time is something of a scarce article with me.' It was much more; it was an act of beneficence to the world of English letters and of English readers for ever and a day. Those bright and vivid notes not only relieve the foggy and prosy twilight of Croker's, but literally illustrate the already radiant text with a fresh illumination of kindly and serviceable guidance.

A very few more references must suffice to show how much longer than is usually supposed the spirit and the intelligence of this great man were able to hold their own against all odds of time and trouble. Witness the hitherto unpublished entry of December 21, 1830. 'Fall back, fall edge, nothing shall induce me to publish what I do not think advantageous to the community, or suppress what is.' Witness also the sensible and temperate note of December 23, when 'obliged to hold a

Black-fishing Court at Selkirk.' One sentence is suggestive of far wider application than any concerning a question of provincial fisheries: 'They have been holding a meeting for reform in Selkirk, and it will be difficult to teach them that this consists in anything else save the privilege of obeying only such laws as please them. . . . Six black-fishers were tried, four were condemned. All went very quietly till the conclusion, when one of the criminals attempted to break out. I stopped him for the time with my own hand.' Witness also the spirited and vigorous lines thrown off as a motto for a chapter of *Count Robert*—from 'The Deluge: a Poem.' Witness, finally, the interview at Malta with the prelate—'one of the priests who commanded the Maltese in their insurrection against the French'—to whom, he says, 'I took the freedom to hint that as he had possessed a journal of this blockade, it was but due to his country and himself to give it to the public, and offered my assistance.'

Further evidence can hardly be needed of the cordial gratitude due from all loyal lovers of Scott—in other words, from all intelligent humanity—to the benefactors who have given us, in these two volumes, the crowning and conclusive proof that he was, if not a greater or a better, an even stronger and happier man than we knew. And to him what further tribute is it possible for love or loyalty, for reverence or devotion, to pay? While the language in which he wrote endures, while the human nature to which he addressed himself exists, there can be no end of the delight, the thanksgiving, and the honour with which men will salute, aloud or in silence, the utterance or the remembrance of his name.

## *RECOLLECTIONS OF PROFESSOR JOWETT.*

AMONG the tributes offered to the memory of an illustrious man there may possibly be found room for the modest reminiscences of one to whom the Master of Balliol was officially a stranger, and Mr. Jowett was an honoured and valued friend. Because the work of his life was mainly if not wholly devoted to Oxford it does not follow and it would be a mistake to assume—as certain of his official mourners or admirers might induce their hearers or readers to assume—that apart from Oxford he was not, and that his only claim to remembrance and reverence is the fact that he put new blood into the veins of an old university. He would have been a noticeable man if he had known no language but the English of which he was so pure and refined a master; and if he had never put pen to paper he would have left his mark upon the minds and the memories of younger men as certainly and as durably as he did. For my own part, I always think of him, by instinct and by preference, as he was wont to show himself in the open air during the course of a long walk and a long talk, intermittent and informal and discursive and irregular to the last and most desirable degree. The perfect freedom, the quaint and positive independence, of his views on character and his outlook on letters would



have given interest to the conversation of a far less distinguished man. That he was an active believer and worker in the cause of spiritual progress and intellectual advance was not more evident than that on some points he was rather more in touch with the past than many men of immeasurably less insight and less faith in the future. He was perhaps the last of the old Whigs; the last man of such brilliant and dominant intelligence to find himself on so many points in such all but absolute sympathy with the view or the purview of such teachers as Sydney Smith and Macaulay. But here as everywhere the candour, the freedom, the manliness and fairness of his ethical and judicial attitude or instinct stood out unimpaired by prepossession or partizanship. With the unconscious malevolence of self-righteousness which distorted the critical appreciations and discoloured the personal estimates of Lord Macaulay, the most ardent Tory could not have had less sympathy than had this far more loyal and large-minded Whig. I am not likely to forget the pleasure with which I found that his judgment on the characters of Dryden and Pope was as charitable (and therefore, in my humble opinion, as equitable and as reasonable) as Macaulay's was perversely one-sided and squint-eyed. To Swift he was perhaps almost more than just; to Rabelais I thought him somewhat less. Of Sydney Smith, again, I found him inclined—if it be possible, as perhaps it may not be—to make too much; of Charles Lamb—I fear I must not hesitate, however reluctant, to say so—at least as much too little. But there was in his own composition so much of quiet appreciative humour that it was always well worth hearing what he had to say upon

humourists. These he divided into three categories or classes: those who are not worth reading at all; those who are worth reading once, but once only; and those who are worth reading again and again and for ever. In the second class he placed the *Biglow Papers*; which famous and admirable work of American humour was, as it happened, the starting-point of our discussion; and for which, as I can hardly think it admissible into the third and crowning class, I would suggest that a fourth might be provided, to include such examples as are worth, let us say, two or three readings in a lifetime.

Dickens, I am happy to think, can hardly have had a more cordial and appreciative admirer than Mr. Jowett. Tennyson, Browning, and Carlyle were all still among us when I once happened to ask him whom he thought the first of living English writers. He hesitated for a minute or so, and then replied, 'If Dickens were alive, I shouldn't hesitate.' As it was, he gave of course the first place to Tennyson, and admitted that he must reluctantly give the second to Carlyle. Of the perverse and sinister and splendid genius which culminated in *Latter-day Pamphlets* and the *Life of Frederick the Great* he was wont to speak with a distaste and a severity which I for one do not in the least believe to have been in the least inspired or intensified by any personal animosity or resentment. Though I must confess that my own belief in the prophet of Craigenputtock as an inspired guide and teacher did not long survive the expiration of my teens, I thought Mr. Jowett's impeachment of his ethics and æsthetics so singularly austere that I one day asked him what it was that he so much disliked or disapproved—in northerly English, what

ailed him at Carlyle: and he replied that his enmity was grounded on the belief that no writer had done or was doing so much harm to young men as the preacher of tyranny and the apologist of cruelty. On another occasion we were talking of Voltaire, and he asked me what I thought the best work of a writer whom he apparently did not greatly relish or appreciate: of *Candide* he spoke with rather too dainty distaste. I might of course have quoted Victor Hugo's incomparably exact and accurate definition—'Voltaire, c'est le bon sens à jet continu:' but I merely replied that, as far as I knew or was able to judge, Voltaire's great work was to have done more than any other man on record to make the instinct of cruelty not only detestable but ludicrous; and so to accomplish what the holiest and the wisest of saints and philosophers had failed to achieve: to attack that most hideous and pernicious of human vices with a more effective weapon than preaching or denunciation: to make tyrants and torturers look not merely horrible and hateful, but pitiful and ridiculous. 'Yes,' Mr. Jowett said: 'and that is the work that Carlyle would undo.'

An amusing if somewhat extreme example of his own exceptional kindness and tolerance was provoked or evoked on another occasion by the genius of Dickens. One evening while he was a guest at my father's it appeared that he had not the honour and happiness of an acquaintance with the immortal and ever delightful figure misintroduced by his creator or his painter as 'Our Bore.' His delight on making that acquaintance it would need the pen of a Dickens to describe; and I only wish Mr. Dickens could have witnessed it. (This,

however, as Charles Lamb's typically Scottish acquaintances would have objected, was impossible, because he was dead.) But after repeated eruptions and subsidences of insuppressible and really boyish laughter he protested—and not entirely, I fancy, in fun—that bores ought not to be so pitilessly made fun of, for they were usually good men. And I do not think this was said in the sardonic sense or in the subacid spirit of a disciple of Thackeray.

To the great genius and the coequally great character of Sir Walter Scott I rejoice to remember that no Scotchman can ever have paid more loyal homage than Mr. Jowett. Scott's noble disclaimer of potential equality or possible rivalry with Burns as a poet aroused such generous and sympathetic admiration in his own high-minded and clear-sighted spirit as cannot be recalled without cordial pleasure. Of poetry he used to say that he considered himself not so much a good critic as 'a good foolometer;' but however that may have been, I always found him an admirable critic of character. Always, I must add, except in one instance: he retained so much of the singular Byronic superstition as to persist—even after Mr. Froude's unanswerable and final demonstration of the truth—in closing the eyes of his judgment if not of his conscience to the universal evidence of irrefragable proof against the character and the honour of Childe Juan. Upon affectation and pretention he was only not too severe because no man can be too severe: upon self-indulgence and sensuality he may have been inclined to pass sentence in a tone or spirit so austere as to prove, had other evidence been wanting, how perfectly and how naturally Spartan was his own

devotion to a purely and exclusively intellectual and moral line of life and scheme of thought. And yet he had for the most affected of sensualists and the most pretentious of profligates a sort of tender or admiring weakness which does not as usual admit of the obvious explanation that he was himself a writer of bad verses. The one point on which I can understand or imagine that he should ever have felt himself in touch with Byron was about the very last that might have been expected from a studious and philosophic man of books and cloisters. I never knew a man of better nerve : and I have known Richard Burton. The physical energy with which he would press up a hill-side or mountain-side—Malvern or Schehallion—was very agreeable and admirable to witness : but twice at least during a week's winter excursion in Cornwall I knew, and had reason to know, what it was to feel nervous : for he would follow along the broken rampart of a ruined castle, and stand without any touch of support at the edge of a magnificent precipice, as though he had been a younger man bred up from boyhood to the scaling of cliffs and the breasting of breakers.

His love of nature, I should say, was temperate but genuine ; certainly genuine, but decidedly temperate. The unique and incomparable sublimity of loveliness which distinguishes the serpentine rocks and cliffs and slopes and platforms of Kynance Cove from any other possible presentation of an earthly paradise could not and did not fail to excite his admiring notice : but I doubt if he recognized that there could be nothing like it in the world. At Tintagel, and again at St. Michael's Mount, I noticed that his energetic perseverance in the

rough and steep ascent was more remarkable, and to himself apparently more pleasurable, than his enjoyment of the glorious outlook so sturdily and so hardily attained. In this more than in most things his real and natural kinship to his beloved Dr. Johnson ('our great friend,' as he used to call him in our many talks on the subject) was not undelightfully manifest. I need not quote evidence from Johnson or from Boswell to that effect. That 'he rode harder at a fox-chase than anybody,' as Johnson affirmed of himself, it would certainly surprise me to be assured : but I think he would have ridden pretty straight if he had ridden at all. And he would never have drawn rein to look about him in forgetfulness of the serious matter in hand : not though the hounds had been running up the Vale of Tempe or across the Garden of Eden.

A very sufficient proof of this indisputable fact is that his chosen favourite among all Shakespeare's comedies was the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. But a still clearer proof, to my mind, was afforded by his selection and rejection of passages and chapters from the Bible for the reading of children. It can hardly be now, I should hope and presume, an indiscretion or a breach of confidence to mention that he had undertaken this task, as he told me, to assist a friend, and asked me to assist him in it : and it certainly cannot be necessary to add how glad I was to do so, or how much and how naturally gratified by the cordial compliment he paid, when we had been some days at work, I dare not say to my scriptural scholarship, but I will say to my thorough familiarity with sundry parts of the sacred text. I noticed almost at once that his notion of what

would be attractive to children excluded much of what I should have thought would be most attractive to an intelligent and imaginative child; that his excerpts would have been almost wholly historical or mythical or moral; and that he evidently did not understand, remember, or take into account, the delight that a child may take in things beyond the grasp of his perfect comprehension, though not beyond the touch of his apprehensive or prehensile fancy, and the incalculable fruitfulness of benefit that may be gradually and unconsciously derived from that delight. But at the assistant's or sub-editor's instigation his draught or scheme of a 'Child's Bible' came gradually and regularly to include so much more and more than his own design would have included of the prophetic or poetic elements in the text, that he said to me one night, with a smile, 'I wanted you to help me to make this book smaller, and you have persuaded me to make it much larger.' To which I replied with a quotation of what Balak said unto Balaam.

No man, I suppose, can enjoy the dignity and exercise the authority of a 'Master' over boys at school or youths at college, without catching some occasional infection of autocratic infirmity; without contracting some dictatorial or domineering habit of mind or tone of manner which affects his natural bearing and impairs his natural influence. Even of the excellent husband of Jeanie Deans it is recorded that 'the man was mortal, and had been a schoolmaster;' and even in Mr. Jowett the Master of Balliol would occasionally, though rarely, break out and rise to the surface 'when there was no need of such vanity.' But these slips or descents from

the natural man into the professional pedagogue were admirably rare; and even if it cannot be confidently affirmed that his bright and brave intelligence was always wholly unaffected by the foggy damp of Oxonian atmosphere, it is certainly undeniable that the affection was never so serious as to make it possible for the most malignant imbecile to compare or to confound him with such morally and spiritually typical and unmistakable apes of the Dead Sea as Mark Pattison, or such renascent blossoms of the Italian renaissance as the Platonic amorist of blue-breeched gondoliers who is now in Aretino's bosom. The cult of the calamus, as expounded by Mr. Addington Symonds to his fellow-calamites, would have found no acceptance or tolerance with the translator of Plato.

There was no touch in Mr. Jowett of the singularly mean and perverse kind of stupidity which makes or used to make the professional parasites of Tennyson and of Browning, of Dickens and of Thackeray, respectively ready to decry or to depreciate the supposed competitor or rival of their master; nor were his critical estimates, I should say, at all generally or unduly coloured or biassed by personal associations. Had the names of Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold been to him simple signs denoting the existence and the character of the artist or the thinker, his judgment of his friend's work could scarcely in either case have been more independent, impartial, and detached. I do not even think that the effusive Oxonolatry of Mr. Arnold can at all have heightened or deepened Mr. Jowett's regard for what he most relished and valued in the author of *Thyrsis*. The appearance of *Literature and*



stion, the record of whose first 'Adventure' was cruelly rechristened by Rossetti's ever happy and spontaneous wit as 'Exhaustion's Imposture,' was not likely to find favour with the critic who once wrote to me, and rejoiced my very soul by writing, 'I have been reading Euripides lately, and still retain my old bad opinion of him—Sophist, sentimentalist, sensationalist—no Greek in the better sense of the term.' It was all I could do, on another occasion, to win from him an admission of the charm and grace and sweetness of some of the shorter and simpler lyrics which redeem in some measure the reputation of the dreariest of playwrights—if that term be not over complimentary for the clumsiest of botchers that ever floundered through his work as a dramatist.

But even when Mr. Browning was not figuring on Hellenic soil as a belated barbarian, it hardly seemed to me that Mr. Jowett was inclined to do anything like sympathetic justice to his friend's incomparable powers. Such general admiration of the man's genius and such comparative depreciation of the writer's works it was so hard to reconcile that I once asked him what it was, then, that he admired in Browning: and the first quality he could allege as admirable to him was Mr. Browning's marvellous range of learning. But of course he was not and he could not have been insensible to the greatness of so colossal a masterpiece, the masterpiece of so gigantic a genius, as the whole world of English readers arose to acclaim on the appearance of *The Ring and the Book*: though the close was over tragic in its elaborate anatomy of moral horror for the endurance of his instinct or his judgment. 'The second Guido is too dreadful,' he said to me—and talked no more on the grim subject.

Mr. Jowett, I believe, has been accused of setting too much store by the casual attributes of position, celebrity, and success : and this weakness, supposing it to have existed, is exactly the kind of infirmity which even the most vigorous judgment might perhaps have been expected to contract from the lifelong habit of looking to class-lists and examinations as a serious test, if not as the final touchstone, of crowning ability as well as of disciplined docility—of inborn capacity no less than of ductile diligence. But he could do justice, and cordial justice, to good work utterly and unaccountably ignored, not merely by the run of readers, but by men of culture, intelligence, and intuition such as universities are supposed to supply to natures naturally deficient in perception and distinction of good and bad. I have seldom if ever known him more impressed than by the noble and pathetic tragedy of *The Earl of Brecon* : the motive or mainspring of the action was at once so new, so true, and so touching as to arouse at once and unmistakably his interest, his admiration, and his surprise. And the very finest works of so rare a genius as Robert Landor's—a genius as thoroughly and nobly and characteristically English on its ethical or sympathetic side as Chaucer's or Shakespeare's, Milton's or Wordsworth's—are still even less recognized and appreciated than even the works of his yet more splendidly gifted brother. But for the generous kindness of my friend Mr. William Rossetti I should never have possessed or been able to lend a copy of his beautiful and neglected and unprocurable plays.

In his views on art Mr. Jowett was something more than a conservative : he would actually maintain that

English poetry had not advanced more than English painting had fallen off since the days of Goldsmith and Reynolds. But it should be needless to add that in his maintenance of this untenable paradox there was nothing of the brassy braggardism and bullying self-confidence of the anonymous amateur or volunteer in criticism whose gaping admiration for the French or American or Japanese art or trick of painting by spots and splashes induces him in common consistency to deride the art of Turner and the art of David Cox. And for the finest work of the great and greatly beloved and lamented painter whose death followed so closely on his own he had such cordial and appreciative admiration that the magnificent portrait of Mr. Madox Brown by himself—a work more than worthy of a place among its rivals in the Uffizj—can never receive the tribute of a fuller and sincerer homage than Mr. Jowett's.

And this, for one thing, may suffice to show how admirably far from the tenacity of arrogance was his habitual tone of mind. A less important but by no means a less significant example may perhaps be worth citing in refutation of the preposterous malignity which would tax him with the positive and obstinate self-conceit of the typical or proverbial pedagogue. He once, to my personal knowledge, requested an old pupil, then staying under his temporary roof, to go over his first version of Plato's *Symposium*, collating it with the original text, and see if he had any suggestion to offer. The old pupil would naturally, I suppose, have felt flattered by the request, even had his Oxonian career culminated in tolerable or creditable success instead of total and scandalous failure : at all events, he fell to and

selection and rejection; that his theology could be detached from his cosmogony, and that it was not as rational and as possible to believe in the Peak of Teneriffe being the Mountain of Purgatory, with Paradise atop of it and Hell just at bottom, as to believe in the loving Lord God of unrighteousness who damns Francesca and glorifies Cunizza, damns Brutus and spares Cato, damns Farinata and sanctifies Dominic. Yet after all this is hardly more bewildering to human reason than that excellent and intelligent multitudes of articulate mortals should call themselves believers in the teaching of their holy writ, and maintain that 'the spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life.'

But Dante, the poet of midnight and all its stars, to whom the sun itself was but one of them, could never have appealed to the serene and radiant intelligence of Mr. Jowett as did the poet of noonday, for whom past and present were one luminous harmony of life—even if, as some have questionably thought, his outlook on the possible future was doubtful and unhopeful. No one can ever have been readier with a quotation from Shakespeare, or happier and apter in the application of it. When he first heard of Mr. Lowell's hideous and Bœotian jest on Milton's blindness—no lover of American humour can fail to remember it—he instantly exclaimed, 'O for a stone-bow to hit him in the eye!' But he frankly and modestly disclaimed the honour of being what he really sometimes seemed to be, a living concordance to Shakespeare: to Boswell alone would he admit, with a smile of satisfaction, that he was or that he might be. And year after year did he renew the promise to fulfil his project and redeem his engage-

ment to undertake the vindication of Boswell as genius and as man. Carlyle and Macaulay, with all their antagonistic absurdities and ineptitudes of misconception and misrepresentation, would then have been refuted and exposed. It is grievous to think that the time spent on translation and commentary should have left him no leisure for so delightful and so serviceable an enterprise.

Even Mr. Jowett could hardly have affirmed of Dr. Johnson that he never slipped into an absolute platitude; and once at least I was surprised to hear Mr. Jowett enunciate the astonishing remark that he could not understand how it was possible at once to like a man and to despise him. We had been talking of a common acquaintance whose instinctive time-serving and obsequious submissiveness to every gust of popular fashion or casual revolution in opinion or in prejudice were as proverbially notorious as his easy amiability; of whom Richard Burton once said to me that he felt certain some good luck must be coming his way, for \*\*\*\*\* was so very civil (the exact word was not 'very,' but by no means a less emphatic one) that he must evidently have heard of some imminent promotion or impending prosperity about to befall the returning traveller: a reasoning which I could not but admit to be more than plausible: and we afterwards used always to speak of this worthy as *The Barometer*. If ever there was a man whose friendships were more independent of such pitifully instinctive calculation—a man more incapable of social cowardice and worldly servility—than Mr. Jowett, I can only say that I never met or heard and never expect to meet or hear of him: but

when I happened to observe of the elder in question that he was a man whom I thought it equally impossible not to like and not to despise, this noble and loyal man of large experience and liberal intelligence replied almost in the tone of a pulpiteer that 'he could not understand how you could like a man whom you despised.' Ingenuous youth happened to be present in some force on the occasion, and I kept silence: not for want of an answer, but out of consideration for their Master and my host.

Few men, I should say, whose line of life lay so far apart from a naturalist's or a poet's can ever have loved nature and poetry better; after the temperate though very real and serious fashion which I have already tried to define or to indicate; but his perception or recollection of the influences of nature upon poetry in particular instances was hardly always accurate. We were returning from a walk across and above the magnificent valley of the Spey, when I remarked on the likeness or kinship of the scenery about us to the poetry of Wordsworth, and he rejoined that he could not associate Wordsworth's poetry with a country which had no lakes in it; forgetting how little of water and how much of mountain or hillside there is in that poet's habitual and representative landscape: so little of the lakes and so much of the hill-tops that but for a senseless nickname we might hardly remember that his life had been spent beside the waters on which some of his finest verses commemorate the perennially happy results of his skating as a boy.

Of the average academic or collegiate one is inclined to think that, in Rossetti's accurate phrase, 'he dies not—never having lived—but ceases': of Mr. Jowett it is

almost impossible at first to think as dead. I, at any rate, never found it harder, if so hard, to realize the death of any one. There was about him a simple and spontaneous force of fresh and various vitality, of happy and natural and wellnigh sleepless energy, which seemed not so much to defy extinction as to deride it. 'He laboured, so must we,' says Ben Jonson of Plato in a noble little book which I had the pleasure of introducing to Mr. Jowett's appreciative acquaintance; and assuredly no man ever lived closer up to that standard of active and studious life than the translator of Plato. But this living energy, this natal force of will and action, was coloured and suffused and transfigured by so rare a quality of goodness, of kindness, of simple and noble amiability, that the intellectual side of his nature is neither the first nor the last side on which the loving and mourning memory of any one ever admitted to his friendship can feel inclined or will be expected to dwell.

## ROBERT HERRICK.

IT is singular that the first great age of English lyric poetry should have been also the one great age of English dramatic poetry ; but it is hardly less singular that the lyric school should have advanced as steadily as the dramatic school declined from the promise of its dawn. Born with Marlowe, it rose at once with Shakespeare to heights inaccessible before and since and for ever, to sink through bright gradations of glorious decline to its final and beautiful sunset in Shirley ; but the lyrical record that begins with the author of *Euphues* and *Endymion* grows fuller if not brighter through a whole chain of constellations, till it culminates in the crowning star of Herrick. Shakespeare's last song, the exquisite and magnificent overture to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, is hardly so limpid in its flow, so liquid in its melody, as the two great songs in *Valentinian* ; but Herrick, our last poet of that incomparable age or generation, has matched them again and again. As a creative and inventive singer he surpasses all his rivals in quantity of good work ; in quality of spontaneous instinct and melodious inspiration he reminds us, by frequent and flawless evidence, who, above all others, must beyond all doubt have been his first master and his first model in lyric poetry—the author of *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love*.



The last of his line, he is and will probably be always the first in rank and station of English song-writers. We have only to remember how rare it is to find a perfect song, good to read and good to sing, combining the merits of Coleridge and Shelley with the capabilities of Tommy Moore and Haynes Bayly, to appreciate the unique and unapproachable excellence of Herrick. The lyrist who wished to be a butterfly, the lyrist who fled or flew to a lone vale at the hour (whatever hour it may be) 'when stars are weeping,' have left behind them such stuff as may be sung, but certainly cannot be read and endured by any one with an ear for verse. The author of the Ode on France and the author of the Ode to the West Wind have left us hardly more than a song apiece which has been found fit for setting to music ; and, lovely as they are, the fame of their authors does not mainly depend on the song of *Glycine* or the song of which Leigh Hunt so justly and so critically said that Beaumont and Fletcher never wrote anything of the kind more lovely. Herrick, of course, lives simply by virtue of his songs ; his more ambitious or pretentious lyrics are merely magnified and prolonged and elaborated songs. Elegy or litany, epicede or epithalamium, his work is always a song-writer's ; nothing more, but nothing less, than the work of the greatest song-writer—as surely as Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist—ever born of English race. The apparent or external variety of his versification is, I should suppose, incomparable ; but by some happy tact or instinct he was too naturally unambitious to attempt, like Jonson, a flight in the wake of Pindar. He knew what he could not do : a rare and invaluable gift. Born a blackbird

or a thrush, he did not take himself (or try) to be a nightingale.

It has often been objected that he did mistake himself for a sacred poet; and it cannot be denied that his sacred verse at its worst is as offensive as his secular verse at its worst; nor can it be denied that no severer sentence of condemnation can be passed upon any poet's work. But neither Herbert nor Crashaw could have bettered such a divinely beautiful triplet as this:—

We see Him come, and know Him ours,  
Who with His sunshine and His showers  
Turns all the patient ground to flowers.

That is worthy of Miss Rossetti herself; and praise of such work can go no higher.

But even such exquisite touches or tones of colour may be too often repeated in fainter shades or more glaring notes of assiduous and facile reiteration. The sturdy student who tackles his Herrick as a schoolboy is expected to tackle his Horace, in a spirit of pertinacious and stolid straightforwardness, will probably find himself before long so nauseated by the incessant inhalation of spices and flowers, condiments and kisses, that if a musk-rat had run over the page it could hardly be less endurable to the physical than it is to the spiritual stomach. The fantastic and the brutal blemishes which deform and deface the loveliness of his incomparable genius are hardly so damaging to his fame as his general monotony of matter and of manner. It was doubtless in order to relieve this saccharine and 'mellisonant' monotony that he thought fit to intersperse these interminable droppings of natural or artificial perfume with

others of the rankest and most intolerable odour ; but a diet of alternate sweetmeats and emetics is for the average of eaters and drinkers no less unpalatable than unwholesome. It is useless and thankless to enlarge on such faults or such defects as it would be useless and senseless to ignore. But how to enlarge, to expatiate, to insist on the charm of Herrick at his best—a charm so incomparable and so inimitable that even English poetry can boast of nothing quite like it or worthy to be named after it—the most appreciative reader will be the slowest to affirm or imagine that he can conjecture. This, however, he will hardly fail to remark : that Herrick, like most if not all other lyric poets, is not best known by his best work. If we may judge by frequency of quotation or of reference, the ballad of the ride from Ghent to Aix is a far more popular, more generally admired and accredited specimen of Mr. Browning's work than *The Last Ride Together*, and *The Lost Leader* than *The Lost Mistress*. Yet the superiority of the less popular poem is in either case beyond all question or comparison ; in depth and in glow of spirit and of harmony, in truth and charm of thought and word, undeniable and indescribable. No two men of genius were ever more unlike than the authors of *Paracelsus* and *Hesperides* ; and yet it is as true of Herrick as of Browning that his best is not always his best-known work. Every one knows the song, 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may ;' few, I fear, by comparison, know the yet sweeter and better song, 'Ye have been fresh and green.' The general monotony of style and motive which fatigues and irritates his too persevering reader is here and there relieved by a change

of key which anticipates the note of a later and very different lyric school. The brilliant simplicity and pointed grace of the three stanzas to CEnone ('What conscience, say, is it in thee') recall the lyrists of the Restoration in their cleaner and happier mood. And in the very fine epigram headed by the words, 'Devotion makes the Deity,' he has expressed for once a really high and deep thought in words of really noble and severe propriety. His *Mad Maid's Song*, again, can only be compared with Blake's, which has more of passionate imagination if less of pathetic sincerity.

## JOHN WEBSTER.

JOHN WEBSTER, the greatest of Shakespeare's contemporaries or successors, was a writer for the stage in the year 1601, and published in 1624 the city pageant for that year, 'invented and written by John Webster, merchant-tailor.' In the same year a tragedy by Ford and Webster was licensed for the stage; it is one of the numberless treasures now lost to us through the carelessness of genius or the malignity of chance. Beyond the period included between these two dates there are no traces to be found of his existence; nor is anything known of it with any certainty during that period, except that seven plays appeared with his name on the title-page, three of them only the work of his unassisted hand. His first noteworthy appearance in print, as far as we know, was as the author of certain additions to Marston's tragicomedy of *The Malcontent*; these probably do not extend beyond the induction, a curious and vivacious prelude to a powerful and irregular work of somewhat morbid and sardonic genius. Three years later, in 1607, two comedies and a tragedy, 'written by Thomas Dekker and John Webster,' were given to the press. The comedies are lively and humorous, full of movement and incident; but the beautiful interlude of poetry which distinguishes the second scene of the fourth act

of *Westward Ho!* is unmistakably and unquestionably the work of Dekker; while the companion comedy of *Northward Ho!* is composed throughout of homespun and coarse-grained prose. *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt* is apparently a most awkward and injurious abridgment of a historical play in two parts on a pathetic but undramatic subject, the fate of Lady Jane Grey. In this lost play of *Lady Jane Heywood*, Chettle, and Smith had also taken part; so that even in its original form it can hardly have been other than a rough piece of patchwork. There are some touches of simple eloquence and rude dramatic ability in the mangled and corrupt residue which is all that survives of it; but on the whole this 'history' is crude, meagre, and unimpressive. In 1612 John Webster stood revealed to the then somewhat narrow world of readers as a tragic poet and dramatist of the very foremost rank in the very highest class. *The White Devil*, also known as *Vittoria Corombona*, is a tragedy based on events then comparatively recent—on a chronicle of crime and retribution in which the leading circumstances were altered and adapted with the most delicate art and the most consummate judgment from the incompleteness of incomposite reality to the requisites of the stage of Shakespeare. By him alone among English poets have the finest scenes and passages of this tragedy been ever surpassed or equalled in the crowning qualities of tragic or dramatic poetry—in pathos and passion, in subtlety and strength, in harmonious variety of art and infallible fidelity to nature. Eleven years had elapsed when the twin masterpiece of its author—if not indeed a still greater or more absolute masterpiece—was published by the poet who had given

it to the stage seven years before. *The Duchess of Malfi* (an Anglicized version of Amalfi, corresponding to such designations as Florence, Venice, and Naples) was probably brought on the stage about the time of the death of Shakespeare; it was first printed in the memorable year which witnessed the first publication of his collected plays. This tragedy stands out among its competitors as one of the imperishable and inextinguishable landmarks of literature. All the great qualities apparent in *The White Devil* reappear in *The Duchess of Malfi*, condensed with a yet more perfect execution, and utilized with a yet more consummate skill. No poet has ever so long and so successfully sustained at their utmost height and intensity the expressed emotions and the united effects of terror and pity. The transcendent imagination and the unparalled sympathy which inspire this most tragic of all tragedies save *King Lear* are fused together in the fourth act into a creation which has hardly been excelled for unflinching energy of impression and of pathos in all the dramatic or poetic literature of the world. Its wild and fearful sublimity of invention is not more exceptional than the exquisite justice and tenderness, and subtlety of its expression. Some of these executive merits may be found in an ill-constructed and ill-conditioned tragicomedy which was printed in the same year; but few readers will care to remember much more of *The Devil's Lane-Case* than the admirable scenes and passages which found favour in the unerring and untiring sight of Webster's first and final interpreter or commentator, Charles Lamb. Thirty-one years later the noble tragedy of *Appius and Virginia* was given to the world—a work which would alone

have sufficed to perpetuate the memory of its author among all competent lovers of English poetry at its best. Seven years afterwards an unprincipled and ignorant bookseller published, under the title of *A Cure for a Cuckold*, a play of which he assigned the authorship to John Webster and William Rowley. This attribution may or may not be accurate; the play is a mixture of coarsely realistic farce and gracefully romantic comedy. An elegy on Henry, Prince of Wales, and a few slight occasional verses, compose the rest of Webster's remaining works.

Webster's claims to a place among the chief writers of his country were ignored for upwards of two centuries. In 1830 the Rev. Alexander Dyce first collected and edited the works of a poet who had found his first adequate recognition twenty-two years earlier at the pious and fortunate hands of Lamb. But we cannot imagine that a presentiment or even a foreknowledge of this long delay in the payment of a debt so long due from his countrymen to the memory of so great a poet would seriously have disturbed or distressed the mind of the man who has given us the clue to his nature in a single and an imperishable sentence—'I rest silent in my own work.'



## BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE critical memoir prefixed by Mr. Dyce to the only good and scholarlike edition of Beaumont and Fletcher has summed up once for all, in fulness of perfect order, what little can now be known of their lives. From this complete and careful record we may take a few main facts and necessary dates illustrative of the life and work of either and of both. Six or seven years before the birth of his brother in art, John Fletcher was born in December 1579 at Rye in Sussex, and baptized on the 20th of the same month. Richard Fletcher, his father, afterwards queen's chaplain, dean of Peterborough, and bishop successively of Bristol, Worcester, and London, was then minister of the parish in which the son was born who was to make their name immortal. That son was just turned of seven when the dean distinguished and disgraced himself as the spiritual tormentor of Mary Stuart's last moments. When not quite twelve he was admitted pensioner of Bene't College, Cambridge, and two years later was made one of the Bible-clerks: of this college Bishop Fletcher had been president twenty years earlier, and six months before his son's admission had received from its authorities a first letter of thanks for various benefactions, to be followed next year by a second. Four years later than this, when John Fletcher wanted five or six months of his seventeenth year, the bishop

died suddenly of overmuch tobacco and the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth at his second marriage—this time, it appears, with a lady of such character as figures something too frequently on the stage of his illustrious son. He left eight children by his first marriage in such distress that their uncle, Dr. Giles Fletcher, author of a treatise on the Russian commonwealth which is still held in some repute, was obliged to draw up a petition to the queen on their behalf, which was supported by the intercession of Essex, but with what result is uncertain. From this date we know nothing of the fortunes of John Fletcher, till the needy orphan boy of seventeen reappears as the brilliant and triumphant poet whose name is linked for all time with the yet more glorious name of Francis Beaumont, third and youngest son of Sir Francis Beaumont of Gr<sup>â</sup>ce-Dieu, one of the justices of the Common Pleas; born, according to general report, in 1586, but, according to more than one apparently irrefragable document, actually born at least a year earlier. The first record of his existence is the entry of his name, together with those of his elder brothers Henry and John, as a gentleman-commoner of Broadgates Hall, Oxford, now supplanted by Pembroke College. But most lovers of his fame will care rather to remember the admirable lines of Wordsworth on the 'eager child' who played among the rocks and woodlands of Gr<sup>â</sup>ce-Dieu; though it may be doubted whether even the boy's first verses were of the peaceful and pastoral character attributed to them by the great laureate of the lakes. That passionate and fiery genius which was so soon and for so short a time to 'shake the buskined stage' with heroic and tragic notes of passion

and of sorrow, of scorn and rage and slighted love and jealousy, must probably have sought yent from the first in fancies of a more ardent and ambitious kind; and it would be a likelier conjecture that when Frank Beaumont (as we know on more authorities than one that he was always called by his contemporaries, even in the full flush of his adult fame—'never more than Frank,' says Heywood) went to college at the ripe age of twelve, he had already committed a tragedy or two in emulation of *Tamburlaine*, *Andronicus*, or *Jeronymo*. The date of his admission was February 4, 1597; on April 22 of the following year his father died; and on November 3, 1600, having left Oxford without taking his degree, the boy of fifteen was entered a member of the Inner Temple, his two brothers standing sponsors on the grave occasion. But the son of Judge Beaumont was no fitter for success at the bar than the son of Bishop Fletcher for distinction in the church: it is equally difficult to imagine either poet invested with either gown. Two years later appeared the poem of *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, a voluptuous and voluminous expansion of the Ovidian legend, not on the whole discreditable to a lad of seventeen, fresh from the popular love-poems of Marlowe and Shakespeare, which it naturally exceeds in long-winded and fantastic diffusion of episodes and conceits. At twenty-two Beaumont prefixed to the magnificent masterpiece of Ben Jonson some noticeable verses in honour of his 'dear friend' the author; and in the same year (1607) appeared the anonymous comedy of *The Woman-Hater*, usually assigned to Fletcher alone; but being as it is in the main a crude and puerile imitation of Jonson's manner,

and certainly more like a man's work at twenty-two than at twenty-eight, internal evidence would seem to justify, or at least to excuse, those critics who in the teeth of high authority and tradition would transfer from Fletcher to Beaumont the principal responsibility for this first play that can be traced to the hand of either. As Fletcher also prefixed to the first edition of *Volpone* a copy of commendatory verses, we may presume that their common admiration for a common friend was among the earliest and strongest influences which drew together the two great poets whose names were thenceforward to be for ever indivisible. During the dim eleven years between the death of his father and the dawn of his fame, we cannot but imagine that the career of Fletcher had been unprosperous as well as obscure. From seventeen to twenty-eight his youth may presumably have been spent in such painful struggles for success, if not for sustenance, as were never known to his younger colleague, who, as we have seen, was entered at Oxford a few months after Fletcher must in all likelihood have left Cambridge to try his luck in London ; a venture most probably resolved on as soon as the youth had found his family reduced by the father's death to such ruinous straits that any smoother course can hardly have been open to him. Entering college at the same age as Fletcher had entered six years earlier, Beaumont had before him a brighter and briefer line of life than his elder. But whatever may have been their respective situations when, either by happy chance or, as Mr. Dyce suggests, by the good offices of Jonson, they were first brought together, their intimacy soon became so much closer than that of ordinary brothers

that the household which they shared as bachelors was conducted on such thoroughly communistic principles as might have satisfied the most trenchant theorist who ever proclaimed, as the cardinal point of his doctrine, a complete and absolute community of bed and board, with all goods thereto appertaining. But in the year following that in which the two younger poets had united in homage to Jonson, they had entered into a partnership of more importance than this in 'the same clothes and cloak,' &c., with other necessities of life specified by Aubrey. In 1608, if we may trust the reckoning which seems trustworthiest, the twin stars of our stage rose visibly together for the first time. The loveliest though not the loftiest of tragic plays that we owe to the comrades or the successors of Shakespeare, *Philaster*, has always been regarded as the first-born issue of their common genius. The noble tragedy of *Thierry and Theodoret* has generally been dated earlier and assigned to Fletcher alone; but we can be sure neither of the early date nor the single authorship. The main body of the play, comprising both the great scenes which throw out into full and final relief the character of either heroine for perfect good or evil, bears throughout the unmistakable image and superscription of Fletcher; yet there are parts which for gravity and steady strength of style, for reserve and temperance of effect, would seem to suggest the collaboration of a calmer and more patient hand; and these more equable and less passionate parts of the poem recall rather the touch of Massinger than of Beaumont. In the second act, for example, the regular structure of the verse, the even scheme of the action, the exaggerated braggardism

which makes of the hero a mere puppet or mouthpiece of his own self-will, are all qualities which, for better or for worse, remind us of the strength or the weakness of a poet with whom we know that Fletcher, before or after his alliance with Beaumont, did now and then work in common. Even the Arbaces of Beaumont, though somewhat too highly coloured, does not 'write himself down an ass,' like Thierry on his first entrance, after the too frequent fashion of Massinger's braggarts and tyrants; does not proclaim at starting or display with mere wantonness of exposure his more unlvely qualities in the naked nature of their deformity. Compare also the second with the first scene of the fourth act. In style and metre this second scene is as good an example of Massinger as the first is of Fletcher at his best. Observe especially in the elaborate narrative of the pretended self-immolation of Ordella these distinctive notes of the peculiar style of Massinger; the excess of parenthetical sentences, no less than five in a space of twenty lines; the classical commonplace of allusion to Athens, Rome, and Sparta in one superfluous breath; the pure and vigorous but somewhat level and prosaic order of language, with the use of certain cheap and easy phrases familiar to Massinger as catchwords; the flat and feeble terminations by means of which the final syllable of one verse runs on into the next without more pause or rhythm than in a passage of prose; the general dignity and gravity of sustained and measured expression. These are the very points in which the style of Massinger differs from that of Fletcher; whose lightest and loosest verses do not overlap each other without sensible distinction between the end of one line and the

beginning of the next ; who is often too fluent and facile to be choice or forcible in his diction, but seldom if ever prosaic or conventional in phrase or allusion, and by no means habitually given to weave thoughts within thoughts, knit sentence into sentence, and hang whole paragraphs together by the help of loops and brackets. From these indications we might infer that this poem belongs altogether to a period later than the death of Beaumont ; though even during his friend's life it appears that Fletcher was once at least allied with Massinger and two lesser dramatists in the composition of some play now unknown to men.

Hardly eight years of toil and triumph, of joyous and glorious life, were spared by destiny to the younger poet between the date assigned to the first radiant revelation of his genius in *Philaster* and the date which marks the end of all his labours. On the 6th of March, 1616, Francis Beaumont died ; according to Jonson and tradition, 'ere he was thirty years of age ;' but this we have seen to be inconsistent with the registry of his entrance at Oxford. If we may trust the elegiac evidence of friends, he died of his own genius and fiery overwork of brain ; yet from the magnificent and masculine beauty of his portrait one would certainly never have guessed that any strain of spirit or stress of invention could have worn out so long before its time so fair and royal a temple for so bright and affluent a soul. A student of physiognomy will not fail to mark the points of likeness and of difference between the faces of the two friends ; both models of noble manhood, handsome and significant in feature and expression alike ;—Beaumont's the statelier and serener of the two, with clear thoughtful

eyes, full arched brows, and strong aquiline nose ; a grave and beautiful mouth, with full and finely curved lips ; the form of face a long pure oval, and the imperial head with its ' fair large front ' and clustering hair set firm and carried high with an aspect at once of quiet command and kingly observation : Fletcher's a more keen and fervid face, sharper in outline every way, with an air of bright ardour and glad fiery impatience ; sanguine and nervous, suiting the complexion and colour of hair ; the expression of the eager eyes and lips almost recalling that of a noble hound in act to break the leash it strains at ;—two heads as lordly of feature and as expressive of aspect as any gallery of great men can show. That spring of 1616, we may note in passing, was the darkest that ever dawned upon England or the world ; for, just forty-eight days afterwards, it witnessed, on the 23rd of April, the removal from earth of the mightiest genius that ever dwelt among men. Scarcely more than a month and a half divided the death-days of Beaumont and of Shakespeare. Some three years earlier by Mr. Dyce's estimate, when about the age of twenty-eight, Beaumont had married Ursula, daughter and coheiress to Henry Isley of Sundridge in Kent, by whom he left two daughters, one of them posthumous. Fletcher survived his friend just nine years and five months ; he died ' in the great plague, 1625,' and was buried on the 29th of August in St. Saviour's, Southwark ; not, as we might have wished, beside his younger fellow in fame, who but three days after his untimely death had added another deathless memory to the graves of our great men in Westminster Abbey, which he had sung in such noble verse. Dying



when just four months short of forty-six, Fletcher had thus, as well as we can now calculate, altogether some fourteen years and six months more of life than the poet who divides with him the imperial inheritance of their common glory.

The perfect union in genius and in friendship which has made one name of the two names of these great twin brothers in song is a thing so admirable and so delightful to remember, that it would seem ungracious and unkindly to claim for either a precedence which we may be sure he would have been eager to disclaim. But if a distinction must be made between the Dioscuri of English poetry, we must admit that Beaumont was the twin of heavenlier birth. Only as Pollux was on one side a demigod of diviner blood than Castor can it be said that on any side Beaumont was a poet of higher and purer genius than Fletcher; but so much must be allowed by all who have eyes and ears to discern in the fabric of their common work a distinction without a difference. Few things are stranger than the avowal of so great and exquisite a critic as Coleridge that he could trace no faintest line of demarcation between the plays which we owe mainly to Beaumont and the plays which we owe solely to Fletcher. To others this line has always appeared in almost every case unmistakable. Were it as hard and broad as the line which marks off, for example, Shakespeare's part from Fletcher's in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the harmony would of course be lost which now informs every work of their common genius, and each play of their writing would be such another piece of magnificent patchwork as that last gigantic heir of Shakespeare's invention, the

posthumous birth of his parting Muse which was suckled at the breast of Fletcher's as a child of godlike blood might be reared on the milk of a mortal mother—or in this case, we might sometimes be tempted to say, of a she-goat who left in the veins of the heaven-born suckling somewhat too much of his nurse Amalthæa. That question however belongs in any case more properly to the study of Shakespeare than to the present subject in hand. It may suffice here to observe that the contributions of Fletcher to the majestic temple of tragedy left incomplete by Shakespeare show the lesser workman almost equally at his best and at his worst, at his weakest and at his strongest. In the plays which we know by evidence surer than the most trustworthy tradition to be the common work of Beaumont and Fletcher, there is indeed no trace of such incongruous and incompatible admixture as leaves the greatest example of romantic tragedy—for *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale*, though not guiltless of blood, are in their issues no more tragic than *Pericles* or the *Tempest*—an unique instance of glorious imperfection, a hybrid of heavenly and other than heavenly breed, disproportioned and divine. But throughout these noblest of the works inscribed generally with the names of both dramatists we trace on every other page the touch of a surer hand, we hear at every other turn the note of a deeper voice, than we can ever recognize in the work of Fletcher alone. Although the beloved friend of Jonson, and in the field of comedy his loving and studious disciple, yet in that tragic field where his freshest bays were gathered Beaumont was the worthiest and the closest follower of Shakespeare—unless indeed this credit may rather be

due to Webster. In the external but essential matter of expression by rhythm and metre he approves himself always a student of Shakespeare's second manner, of the style in which the graver or tragic part of his historical or romantic plays is mostly written ; doubtless the most perfect model that can be studied by any poet who, like Beaumont, is great enough to be in no danger of sinking to the rank of a mere copyist, but while studious of the perfection set before him is yet conscious of his own personal and proper quality of genius, and enters the presence of the master not as a servant but as a son. The general style of his tragic or romantic verse is as simple and severe in its purity of note and regularity of outline as that of Fletcher's is by comparison lax, effusive, exuberant. The matchless fluency and rapidity with which the elder brother pours forth the stream of his smooth swift verse gave probably the first occasion for that foolish rumour which has not yet fallen duly silent, but still murmurs here and there its suggestion that the main office of Beaumont was to correct and contain within bounds the overflowing invention of his colleague. The poet who while yet a youth had earned by his unaided mastery of hand such a crown as was bestowed by the noble love and the loving 'envy' of Ben Jonson was, according to this tradition, a mere precocious pedagogue, fit only to revise and restrain the too liberal effusions of his elder in genius as in years. Now, in every one of the plays common to both, the real difficulty for a critic is not to trace the hand of Beaumont, but to detect the touch of Fletcher. Throughout the better part of every such play, and above all of their two masterpieces, *Philaster* and *The Maid's*

*Tragedy*, it should be clear to the most sluggish or cursory of readers that he has not to do with the author of *Valentinian* and *The Double Marriage*. In those admirable tragedies the style is looser, more fluid, more feminine. From the first scene to the last we are swept as it were along the race of a running river, always at full flow of light and buoyant melody, with no dark reaches or perilous eddies, no stagnant pools or sterile sandbanks; its bright course only varied by sudden rapids or a stronger ripple here and there, but in rough places or smooth still stirred and sparkling with summer wind and sun. But in those tragic poems of which the dominant note is the note of Beaumont's genius a subtler chord of thought is sounded, a deeper key of emotion is touched, than ever was struck by Fletcher. The lighter genius is palpably subordinate to the stronger, and loyally submits itself to the impression of a loftier spirit. It is true that this distinction is never grave enough to produce a discord: it is also true that the plays in which the predominance of Beaumont's mind and style is generally perceptible make up altogether but a small section of the work that bears their names conjointly; but it is no less true that within this section the most precious part of that work is comprised. Outside it we shall find no figures so firmly drawn, no such clearness of outline, no such cunning of hand, as we recognize in the three great studies of Bellario, Evadne, and Aspatia. In his male characters, as for instance in the parts of Philaster and Arbaces, Beaumont also is apt to show something of that exaggeration or inconsistency for which his colleague is more frequently if not more heavily to blame; but in these

there is not a jarring note, not a touch misplaced ; unless, indeed, a rigid criticism may condemn as unfeminine and incongruous with the gentle beauty of her pathetic patience the device by which Aspatia procures herself the death desired at the hand of Amintor. This is noted as a fault by Mr. Dyce ; but may well be forgiven for the sake of the magnificent scene which follows, and the highest tragic effect ever attained on the stage of either poet. That this as well as the greater part of those other scenes which are the glory of the poem is due to Beaumont might readily be shown at length by the process of comparison. The noble scene of regicide, which it was found expedient to cancel during the earlier years of the Restoration, may indeed be the work of Fletcher ; but the part of Evadne may almost certainly be in the main assigned to the more potent hand of his fellow. There is a fine harmony of character between her naked audacity in the second act and her fierce repentance in the fourth, which is not unworthy a disciple in the tragic school of Shakespeare ; Fletcher is less observant of the due balance, less heedful of the nice proportions of good and evil in a faulty and fiery nature, compounded of perverse instinct and passionate reaction. From him we might have had a figure as admirable for vigour of handling, but hardly in such perfect keeping as this of Beaumont's Evadne, the murderess-Magdalen, whose penitence is of one crimson colour with her sin. Nor even in Fletcher's *Ordella*, worthy as the part is throughout even of the precious and exquisite praise of Lamb, is there any such cunning touch of tenderness or delicate perfume of pathos as in the parts of Bellario and Aspatia. These have in them a bitter sweetness, a subtle

pungency of mortal sorrow and tears of divine delight, beyond the reach of Fletcher. His highest studies of female character have dignity, energy, devotion of the heroic type ; but they never touch us to the quick, never waken in us any finer and more profound sense than that of applause and admiration. There is a modest pathos now and then in his pictures of feminine submission and slighted or outraged love ; but this submission he is apt to make too servile, this love too doglike in its abject devotion, to retain that tender reverence which so many generations of readers have paid to the sweet memories of Aspatia and Bellario. To excite compassion was enough for Fletcher, as in the masculine parts of his work it was enough for him to excite wonder, to sustain curiosity, to goad and stimulate by any vivid and violent means the interest of readers or spectators. The single instance of noble pathos, the one scene he has left us which appeals to the higher and purer kind of pity, is the death of the child Hengo in *Bonduca*—a scene which of itself would have sufficed to enrol his name for ever on the list of our great tragic poets. To him we may probably assign the whole merit of that fiery and high-toned tragedy, with all its spirit and splendour of national and martial passion ; the conscious and demonstrative exchange of courtesy between Roman and Briton, which is one of the leading notes of the poem, has in it a touch of overstrained and artificial chivalry characteristic of Fletcher ; yet the parts of Caratach and Pœnius may be counted among the loftiest and most equal of his creations. But no surer test or better example can be taken of the distinctive quality which denotes the graver genius of either poet than that sup-

of the *Burning Pestle* through his adventurous career to its untimely end, has all the force and fulness of Jonson's humour at its best, with more of freshness and freedom. In pure comedy, varied with broad farce and mock-heroic parody, Beaumont was the earliest as well as the ablest disciple of the master whose mantle was afterwards to be shared among the academic poets of a younger generation, the Randolphs and Cartwrights who sought shelter under the shadow of its voluminous folds. The best example of the school of Jonson to be found outside the ample range of his own work is *The Scornful Lady*, a comedy whose exceptional success and prolonged popularity must have been due rather to the broad effect of its forcible situations, its wealth and variety of ludicrous incidents, and the strong gross humour of its dialogue, than to any finer quality of style, invention, or character. It is the only work of Beaumont and Fletcher which a critic who weighs the meaning of his words can admit to be almost as coarse as the coarser work of Ben Jonson. They are prone indeed to indulge elsewhere in a wanton and exuberant licence of talk; and Fletcher at least is liable to confuse the shades of right and wrong, to deface or efface the boundary lines of good and evil, to stain the ermine of virtue and palliate the nakedness of vice with the same indecorous and incongruous laxity of handling. Often, in mere haste to despatch the business of a play, to huddle up a catastrophe or throw out some particular scene into sharp and immediate relief, he will sacrifice all seemliness and consistency of character to the present aim of stage effect, and the instant impression of strong incident or audacious eloquence. His heroines

are too apt to utter sentiments worthy of Diana in language unworthy of Doll Tearsheet. But in this play both style and sentiment are throughout on a lower level, the action and emotion are of a baser kind than usual; the precept of Aristotle and the practice of Jonson have been so carefully observed and exaggerated that it might almost be said to offer us in one or two places an imitation not merely of the sorrier but of the sorriest qualities of human nature; and full as it is of spontaneous power and humorous invention, the comedy extolled by the moral Steele (with just so much of reservation as permits him to deprecate the ridicule cast upon the clerical character) is certainly more offensive to artistic law and æsthetic judgment by the general and ingrained coarseness of its tone than the tragic-comedy denounced by the immoral Dryden as exceeding in licence his own worst work and that of his fellow-playwrights; an imputation, be it said in passing, as groundless as the protest pleaded on their behalf is impudent; for though we may hardly agree with the uncompromising panegyrist who commends that play in particular to the approval of 'the austere scarlet' (remembering, perhaps, that Aristophanes was the chosen bedfellow of Chrysostom), there is at least no such offence against art or taste in the eccentricity of its situations or the daring of its dialogue. The buoyant and facile grace of Fletcher's style carries him lightly across quagmires in which a heavier-footed poet, or one of slower tread, would have stuck fast, and come forth bemired to the knees. To Beaumont his stars had given as birthright the gifts of tragic pathos and passion, of tender power and broad strong humour; to Fletcher



had been allotted a more fiery and fruitful force of invention, a more aerial ease and swiftness of action, a more various readiness and fulness of bright exuberant speech. The genius of Beaumont was deeper, sweeter, nobler than his elder's: the genius of Fletcher more brilliant, more supple, more prodigal and more voluble than his friend's. Without a taint or a shadow on his fame of such imitative servility as marks and degrades the mere henchman or satellite of a stronger poet, Beaumont may fairly be said to hold of Shakespeare in his tragedy, in his comedy of Jonson; in each case rather as a kinsman than as a client, as an ally than as a follower: but the more special province of Fletcher was a land of his own discovering, where no later colonist has ever had power to settle or to share his reign. With the mixed or romantic comedy of Shakespeare it has nothing in common except the admixture or alternation of graver with lighter interest, of serious with humorous action. Nothing is here of his magic exaltation or charm of fairy empire. The rare and rash adventures of Fletcher on that forbidden track are too sure to end in pitiful and shameful failure. His crown of praise is to have created a wholly new and wholly delightful form of mixed comedy or dramatic romance, dealing merely with the humours and sentiments of men, their passions and their chances; to have woven of all these a web of emotion and event with such gay dexterity, to have blended his colours and combined his effects with such exquisite facility and swift light sureness of touch, that we may return once and again from those heights and depths of poetry to which access was forbidden him, ready as ever to enjoy as of old the fresh

incomparable charm, the force and ease and grace of life, which fill and animate the radiant world of his romantic invention. Neither before him nor after do we find, in this his special field of fancy and of work, more than shadows or echoes of his coming or departing genius. Admirable as are his tragedies already mentioned, rich in splendid eloquence and strong in large grasp of character as is the Roman history of *The False One*, full of interest and vigour as is the better part of *Rollo Duke of Normandy*, and sublime in the loveliness of passion as is the one scene of perfect beauty and terror which crowns this latter tragedy, Fletcher may claim a yet higher and more special station among his great dramatic peers by right of his comic and romantic than by right of his tragic and historic plays. Even in these he is more a romantic than a tragic poet. The quality of his genius, never sombre or subtle or profound, bears him always towards fresh air and sunshine. His natural work is in a midday world of fearless boyish laughter and hardly bitter tears. There is always more of rainbow than of storm in his skies; their darkest shadow is but a tragic twilight. What with him is the noon of night would seem as sunshine on the stage of Ford or Webster. There is but one passage in all these noble plays which lifts us beyond a sense of the stage, which raises our admiration out of speech into silence, tempers and transfigures our emotion with a touch of awe. And this we owe to the genius of Beaumont, exalted for an instant to the very tone and manner of Shakespeare's tragedy, when Amintor stands between the dead and the dying woman whom he has unwittingly slain with hand and tongue. The first

few lines that drop from his stricken lips are probably the only verses of Beaumont or Fletcher which might pass for Shakespeare's even with a good judge of style:—

This earth of mine doth tremble, and I feel  
A stark affrighted motion in my blood ;  
My soul grows weary of her house, and I  
All over am a trouble to myself.

But in Fletcher's tragedy, however we may be thrilled and kindled with high contagious excitement, we are never awed into dumb delight or dread, never pierced with any sense of terror or pity too deep or even deep enough for tears. Even his *Brunhalts* and *Martias* can hardly persuade us to forget for the moment that 'they do but jest, poison in jest.' A critic bitten with the love of classification might divide those plays of Fletcher usually ranked together as comedies into three kinds: the first he would class under the head of pure comedy, the next of heroic or romantic drama, the third of mixed comedy and romance ; in this, the last and most delightful division of the poet's work, the special qualities of the two former kinds being equally blended and delicately harmonized. The most perfect and triumphant examples of this class are *The Spanish Curate*, *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Elder Brother*. Next to these, and not too far below them, we may put *The Little French Lawyer* (a play which in its broad conception of a single eccentric humour suggests the collaboration of Beaumont and the influence of Jonson, but in style and execution throughout is perfect Fletcher), *The Humorous Lieutenant* (on which an almost identical verdict might be passed), *Women*

*Pleased, Beggars' Bush*, and perhaps we might add *The Fair Maid of the Inn*; in most if not in all of which the balance of exultant and living humour with serious poetic interest of a noble and various kind is held with even hand and the skill of a natural master. In pure comedy *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* is the acknowledged and consummate masterpiece of Fletcher. Next to it we might class, for comic spirit and force of character, *Wit Without Money*, *The Wildgoose Chase*, *The Chances*, and *The Noble Gentleman*—a broad poetic farce to whose overflowing fun and masterdom of extravagance no critic has ever done justice but Leigh Hunt, who has ventured, not without reason, to match its joyous and preposterous audacities of superlative and sovereign foolery with the more sharp-edged satire and practical merriment of *King and No King*, where the keen prosaic humour of Bessus and his swordsmen is as typical of the comic style in which Beaumont had been trained up under Ben Jonson as the high interest and graduated action of the serious part of the play are characteristic of his more earnest genius. Among the purely romantic plays of Fletcher, or those in which the comic effect is throughout subordinate to the romantic, *The Knight of Malta* seems most worthy of the highest place for the noble beauty and exaltation of spirit which inform it with a lofty life, for its chivalrous union of heroic passion and Catholic devotion. This poem is the fairest and the first example of those sweet fantastic paintings in rose-colour and azure of visionary chivalry and ideal holiness, by dint of which the romance of more recent days has sought to cast the glamour of a mirage over the darkest and deadliest 'ages of faith.' The pure and

fervent eloquence of the style is in perfect keeping with the high romantic interest of character and story. In the same class we may rank among the best samples of Fletcher's workmanship *The Pilgrim*, *The Loyal Subject*, *A Wife for a Month*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, and *The Lover's Progress*—rich all of them in exquisite writing, in varied incident, in brilliant effects and graceful or passionate interludes. In *The Coxcomb* and *The Honest Man's Fortune*—two plays which, on the whole, can hardly be counted among the best of their class—there are tones of homelier emotion, touches of a simpler and more pathetic interest than usual; and here, as in the two admirable first scenes between Leucippus and Bacha, which relieve and redeem from contempt the tragic burlesque of *Cupid's Revenge*, the note of Beaumont's manner is at once discernible. This can be traced in only two other plays as yet unmentioned: *The Laws of Candy*, a rather crude and sterile specimen of romantic comedy, and *Wit at Several Weapons*, a violent farce, outrageous but not unamusing, ambitious rather than felicitous as a study in the school of Jonson. Two later comedies of Fletcher's, *The Sea-Voyage* and *The Nice Valour*, have less than usual of his easy grace and brightness of style to atone for the impotent extravagance and the vehement inanity of their feeble and foolish and incomposite groundwork. No other plays in the collection are so barren of merit as these: for the demerit of *The Faithful Friends* is hardly more obvious than its apocryphal character. Less palpably apocryphal, but far enough from unquestionable, is the attribution to Fletcher or to Jonson of a share in Middleton's light and brilliant comedy of *The Widow*. The attempt of

Fletcher to emulate Shakespeare by writing a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* displays as light-hearted an audacity and achieves as dubious a success as his enterprise in the completion of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; in either case there is enough of brilliant and facile energy to make us realize the writer's inadequacy for the task undertaken at least as vividly as if the adventurer had been a less able playwright and a less admirable master of light and ready improvisation. *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*, is a splendid example of clever and dexterous incompetence, of superb and daring inability, to compete with a genius too great for the rivalry of a greater than its author. *The Prophetess* is amusing and well written, but hopelessly incongruous in structure and radically unimaginative in conception; *The Mad Lover* is equally preposterous on these grounds, but more coherent in its construction and more consistent in its extravagance; *The Queen of Corinth* is hardly redeemed from failure by rare interludes of interest and beauty among scenes of unattractive and violent mediocrity. *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid*, is even more agreeable than absurd as an example of Fletcher's very lightest and hastiest manner; *The Island Princess*, more outrageous in its incongruities, is at once livelier and more serious in style; *The Maid in the Mill* is chiefly noticeable for the singular and incongruous alliance of the city and the court in the persons of its authors, Rowley and Fletcher—a severe censor might add, for the union of rudeness and vulgarity on one side with corruption and affectation on the other; *The Night-Walker* is very spirited in manner, very extravagant in matter; *The Captain* is admirable in style and versifica-

tion throughout, admirable in dramatic evolution of character and conduct of serious incident up to the point where the depravity of the leading figure passes into a monstrous form of madness and disfigures the comic harmony with an infusion of worse than tragic horror.

Even the most rapid revision of the work done by these great twin poets must impress every capable student with a sense of the homage due to this living witness of their large and liberal genius. The loss of their names from the roll of English poetry would be only less than the loss of the few greatest inscribed on it. Nothing could supply the want of their tragic, their comic or romantic drama ; no larger or more fiery planet can ever arise to supplant or to eclipse the twin lights of our zodiac. Whatever their faults of shortcoming or excess, there is in their very names or the mere thought of their common work a kind of special and personal attraction for all true lovers of high dramatic poetry. There is the glory and grace of youth in all they have left us ; if there be also somewhat too much of its graceless as well as its gracious qualities, yet there hangs about their memory as it were a music of the morning, a breath and savour of bright early manhood, a joyous and vigorous air of free life and fruitful labour, which might charm asleep for ever all thought or blame of all mortal infirmity or folly. For good or for evil, they are above all things poets of youth ; we cannot conceive of them grown grey in the dignity of years, venerable with the authority of long life, and weighted with the wisdom of experience. In the Olympian circle of the gods and the giants of our race

who on earth were their contemporaries and corrivals, they seem to move among the graver presences and figures of sedater fame like the two spoilt boys of heaven, lightest of foot and heart and head of all the brood of deity. Shakespeare may have smiled as Jonson may have nodded approval of their bright swift work, neither of these great elders grudging his praise to the special charm which won for it a preference during one generation at least even over their own loftier and weightier verse ; and indeed the advance in natural ease, in truth and grace of dialogue, is alike manifest whether we turn to such of their comic characters as Valentine and Don John, Rutilio and Monsieur Thomas, from the Truewit of Jonson or even from the Mercutio of Shakespeare ; the one too stiff with classic starch, the other too full of mere verbal catches and forced conceits, to persuade us that either can in any age have fairly represented the light free talk and facile humour of its youth. In another field than this Beaumont and Fletcher hold as high and secure a station of their own as any poet of their race. In perfect workmanship of lyrical jewellery, in perfect bloom and flower of song-writing, they equal all compeers whom they do not excel ; the blossoms of their growth in this kind may be matched for colour and fragrance against Shakespeare's, and for morning freshness and natural purity of form exceed the finest grafts of Jonson. *The Faithful Shepherdess* alone might speak for Fletcher on this score, being as it is simply a lyric poem in semi-dramatic shape, to be judged only as such, and as such almost faultless ; but in no wise to be classed for praise or blame among the acting plays of its author, whose one serious error in the matter was the



submission of his Dryad to the critical verdict of an audience too probably in great part composed of clowns and satyrs far unlike the loving and sweet-tongued sylvan of his lovely fancy. And in the very foolishhest and feeblest of his plays that divine song of melancholy (*mæstius lacrymis Simonideis*), perfect in form as Catullus and profound in sentiment as Shelley, which Milton himself could but echo and expand, could not heighten or deepen its exquisite intensity of thought and word alike, bears witness enough for the gayer and lighter poet of a lyric power as pure and rare as his loftier and graver comrade's.

The excess of influence and popularity over that of other poets usually ascribed to the work of Beaumont and Fletcher for some half-century or so after their own time has perhaps been somewhat overstated by tradition. Whatever may have been for a season the fashion of the stage, it is certain that Shakespeare can show two editions for one against them in folio; four in all from 1623 to 1685, while they have but their two of 1647 and 1679. Nor does one see how it can accurately or even plausibly be said that they were in any exact sense the founders of a school either in comedy or in tragedy. Massinger, for some years their survivor, and in some points akin to them as a workman, cannot properly be counted as their disciple; and no leading poet of the time had so much in common with them as he. At first sight, indeed, his choice of romantic subject and treatment of foreign stories, gathered from the fertile tale-tellers of the south, and ranging in date from Boccaccio to Cervantes, may seem to mark him out as a member of the same school; but the deepest and most distinctive

qualities of his genius set it apart from theirs ; though undoubtedly not so far that any discrepancy or discord should impair the excellence or injure the keeping of works in which he took part with Fletcher. Yet, placed beside theirs, the tone of his thought and speech seems by comparison severe as well as sober, and sad as well as severe. Their extravagant and boyish insanity of prostrate royalism is not more alien from his half pensive and half angry undertone of political protest than his usually careful and complete structure of story from their frequently lax and slovenly incoherence of character or plot, than his well composed and proportioned metre from their lighter and looser melodies, than the bitter insistence and elaborate acrimony of his judicial satire on hypocrisy or oppression from the gaiety or facility of mood which suffers them in the shifting of a scene to redeem their worst characters by some juggler's trick of conversion at the last moment allowed them to wind up a play with universal reconciliation and an act of oblivion on all hands. They could hardly have drawn with such steady skill and explicit finish an *Overreach* or a *Luke* ; but the strenuous and able work of Massinger at its highest point of success has no breath in it of their brighter and more immediate inspiration. Shirley, on the other hand, may certainly be classed as a pupil who copied their style in water-colour ; his best tragedy and his best comedies might pass muster undetected among the plays of Fletcher, and might fairly claim to take rank above the lower class of these. In the finest work of Middleton we recognize an almost exact reproduction of Fletcher's metrical effects—a reverberation of that flowing music, a reiteration of those

feminine final notes. In his later tragi-comedies, throughout his masterpiece of *Women beware Women*, and in the noble scenes which make up the tragic or serious part of *The Changeling* or *The Spanish Gipsy*—wherever, in a word, we find the admirable but unequal genius of this poet at its best—we find a likeness wholly wanting in his earlier and ruder work, which undoubtedly suggests the influence of Fletcher. Other instances of imitation, other examples of discipleship, might perhaps be found among lesser men of the next generation; but the mass of succeeding playwrights began in a very short time to lower the style and debase the scheme of dramatic poetry; and especially to loosen the last ties of harmony, to deface the very form and feature of tragic verse. In *Shirley*, the last if not the least of those in whom the lineal blood of the old masters was yet discernible, we find side by side with the fine ancestral indications of legitimate descent exactly such marks of decadence rather than degeneracy as we might have anticipated in the latest heir of a long line which began with the rise of Marlowe, ‘son of the morning,’ in the highest heaven of our song, to prepare a pathway for the sun. After Shakespeare there was yet room for Beaumont and Fletcher; but after these and the other constellations had set, whose lights filled up the measure of that diviner zodiac through which he moved, there was but room in heaven for the gentle afterglow of *Shirley*; and before this last reflex from a sunken sun was itself eclipsed, the glory had passed away from our drama, to alight upon that summit of epic song whence Milton held communion with darkness and the stars.

‘I have never been able to distinguish the presence

of Fletcher during the life of Beaumont, nor the absence of Beaumont during the survival of Fletcher.' This most astonishing avowal was made by one of the greatest among poets, who was also—now and then, by fits and starts—a very great critic. It is sufficient to prove that his criticism of Beaumont and Fletcher must be throughout vitiated by prejudice or paralyzed by incapacity to appreciate aright the merits or the demerits of those two immortal twins. But Coleridge was never systematic or coherent in criticism; on poetry, on philosophy, on theology, on politics, he delivered his soul at random, and after such a fashion as to call up the fancy of a first-rate player at billiards or at chess who took pleasure in playing blindfold. His good hits, or his good moves, are naturally nothing less than admirable; indeed, no subsequent player can hope to follow them; but when he goes wrong he is more hopelessly wrong than the most incompetent novice. It is not, and it naturally could not have been, so easy to distinguish Beaumont from Fletcher as it is to distinguish Fletcher from Shakespeare; but the radical difference between *The Scornful Lady* and *The Spanish Curate*, between *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Double Marriage*, between *Philaster* and *Valentinian*, must surely be perceptible to all eyes less sand-blind or high-gravel-blind than theirs who cannot at once verify the presence or the absence of Shakespeare's hand in the text of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The immeasurable superiority of Beaumont as a tragic poet, of Fletcher as a comic dramatist, is so patent, so glaring, so palpable, that we can only explain the hebetude or the perversity of Coleridge by the supposition that he had never really

read the plays on which he thought fit to pass judgment in a tone of such fitful and vehement austerity. And yet, of course, his notes on them are more valuable, more helpful, more suggestive, than any other man's could be. Even when they are utterly and desperately perverse, they provide material for saner criticism and more serious reflection. They should be compared with the admirably sensible and careful estimate given of each play by Mr. Dyce in his exhaustive 'account of the lives and writings of Beaumont and Fletcher.' The sound and studious judgment of the editor is the best of all possible correctives to the headlong and haphazard verdicts of the more illustrious and less trustworthy commentator. It is of course impossible to ignore the critical imputations or objections of Coleridge; it is all the more necessary to examine their accuracy and validity with greater care than we should think it worth while to take in the case of a lesser man or critic. And the more thoroughly and impartially we do so, the more certainly and regretfully shall we perceive in his criticism a fusion of malevolence with incompetence, of prejudice with misconception, of would-be candour with obvious prepossession, which is difficult to understand in a critic of the nineteenth century when commenting on a poet of the seventeenth. 'It would be worth while,' he says, 'to note how many of these plays are founded on rapes, how many on incestuous passions, and how many on mere lunacies.' I should not have thought it at all worth while; but in face of so foul and injurious an insinuation it possibly may be. Among fifty-two plays there are exactly two which are founded on rapes, *Valentinian* and *The Queen of Corinth*; there

is not one which is founded on an incestuous passion, for the whole action of *King and No King* hinges on the fact that Arbaces and Panthea are not brother and sister, but absolute strangers in blood ; and if we except *The Mad Lover* and *The Nice Valour*, which may fairly be held liable to such a charge, I cannot discover an example of the 'plays founded on mere lunacies.' Two lyric poets, immortal in their different degrees, have passed sentence on Beaumont and Fletcher ; and though I am not quite prepared to affirm with Lovelace that 'the austere scarlet' might approve such a comedy as *The Custom of the Country*, I am certain that the kindly extravagance of his enthusiasm for these great if not blameless dramatists comes far nearer the truth than the captious if not rancorous commentary of Coleridge.

## SOCIAL VERSE.

1891.

To improve on the collection or selection of poems issued years ago under the title of *Lyra Elegantiarum* might have seemed impossible even for its editor: but Mr. Locker-Lampson has done so. In all such volumes a reader will usually find omissions to regret and insertions which surprise him: to take note of these is the best and sincerest tribute he can pay to the excellence of the general accomplishment—the fullest acknowledgment he can make of the high standard maintained and the happy success achieved. And when all necessary deductions on either score have been duly made and registered, it will remain evident to the capable reader that there is no better or completer anthology than this in the language: I doubt indeed if there be any so good and so complete. No objection or suggestion that can reasonably be offered can in any way diminish our obligation either to the original editor or to his evidently able assistant Mr. Kernahan in the compilation of a larger if not a more ambitious volume.

The crowning merit, the first and highest distinction of the book, is the fair if not yet quite adequate prominence given now for the first time to the name of the great man whose lightest and slightest claim to immor-

tality is his indisputable supremacy over all possible competitors as a writer of social or occasional verse more bright, more graceful, more true in tone, more tender in expression, more deep in suggestion, more delicate in touch, than any possible Greek or Latin or French or English rival's. Meleager no less than Voltaire, and Prior no less than Catullus,<sup>1</sup> must on this ground give place to Landor. The editors, to their lasting honour, have put into their casket no less than thirty-eight of his flawless and incomparable jewels: but how came they to overlook a thirty-ninth yet lovelier than all? There is nothing in the volume, there is nothing in the language, comparable with the quatrain on Dirce in the boat of Charon.

Stand close around, ye Stygian set,  
 With Dirce in one boat conveyed I  
 Or Charon, seeing, may forget  
 That he is old and she a shade.

And how comes it that we miss the exquisitely and nobly beautiful stanzas addressed to his 'little household gods'? or the lovely song (as of a graver and more thoughtful Herrick) addressed to the cistus flower? or, again, this gracefulest and sweetest of all compliments ever offered to a sweet and graceful English girl?

Nature! thou may'st fume and fret,  
 'There's but one white violet:  
 Scatter o'er the vernal ground  
 Faint resemblances around,  
 Nature, I will tell thee yet  
 'There's but one white violet.

<sup>1</sup> Such a poem as that on his old yacht would no doubt be the greatest example on record of such work, if it were not this and something more.



It might doubtless be pleaded in extenuation of such editorial delinquencies or derelictions that a fairly adequate or representative selection from Landor's minor poems would probably have taken up half the volume : but what excuse can be offered for the omission of such a jewel as this ?

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel ;  
My fingers ache, my lips are dry ;  
Oh ! if you felt the pain I feel !  
But oh, who ever felt as I !

No longer could I doubt him true :  
All other men may use deceit ;  
He always said my eyes were blue,  
And often swore my lips were sweet.

Low as is the key of these tenderer verses in comparison with the fiery and faultless music, the subtle and simple intensity of the four transcendent lines which suggested them, it seems to me that Sappho's very self might have smiled approval or at least condonation of their gentler loveliness and less passionate melody than her own.

The great name of Landor naturally and happily suggests the great name of Browning : and the beautiful 'garden fancy' of the flower's Spanish name is worthy of its place in the highest class of such poems as are included in the scheme of this collection. But the greater poem of *Youth and Art* seems here, to me at least, somewhat out of place. There is hardly a more tragic touch in all the most tragic passages of Mr. Browning's vast and various work than that which winds up, with neither a smile nor a sigh, the unspoken expression of hopeless and inexpressible regret.

And nobody calls you a dunce,  
And people suppose me clever :  
This could but have happened once,  
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

That is not a sample of social verse : it is an echo from the place of conscious or unconscious torment which is paved with penitence and roofed with despair. Its quiet note of commonplace resignation is more bitter and more impressive in the self-scornful sadness of its retrospect than any shriek of rebellion or any imprecation of appeal. And if elegance is the aim or the condition of this anthology, how comes it to admit such an unsurpassably horrible example of inelegance as the line—I refrain from quoting it—which refers to the ‘settling’ of ‘Gibson’s hash’?

The incomparable *Lost Mistress*, that crowning flower or jewel of its author’s treasure-house or garden, was probably (and it may be rightly) found to be ‘just above the range of Occasional Verse’ in its ‘aim and execution.’ But it is so delicately difficult to draw such a line between admission and rejection that the reader who misses and regrets this exquisite little poem will be surprised to find how far above the average of social or occasional verse are some of the lyrics admitted within a fold so exclusive. And such a reader will assuredly regret the admission into its catalogue of the name which is above every name on the roll of English lyrists. There should have been no place here for Coleridge. No ‘son of Adam’ (as his satirical ‘interviewer’ Mr. Carlyle would have said) can wish to see him represented by such flabby doggrel as might have dropped from the Tupper of America or the Longfellow of England.

The adoring lovers of Christabel must surely be unanimous in their protest against the reappearance of her poet as the congratulatory apostrophist of Louisa dear—that lovely convalescent. Descending from the zenith to the nadir of serious lyric verse—from the name of Coleridge to the name of Moore, we find the bardling of Erin excellently well represented by at least one really charming little epigram ('When I loved you'): and the other specimens given of his talent are very fair ones. But to give a just notion of that fresh and facile talent at its very best and brightest it would have been necessary, as it might surely have been feasible, to borrow from Moore's still delightful masterpiece, the correspondence of the Fudge Family, some samples of an epistle or so—enough perhaps to place once more on record the star-crossed loves of Miss Biddy Fudge and Colonel Calicot.

But it is at the opening of the book that the sins of omission or commission, the errors of indulgence or default, are gravest and most regrettable. Skelton is either too late or too early to begin with: and we look in vain for a ballad or a roundel of Chaucer's—less antiquated in form and not more obsolete in language than the rough and ready rhymes of Henry VIII.'s and Elinor Rummyng's poet laureate.

Than seyde Love, 'a ful gret negligence  
Was hit to thee, that ilke tyme thou made  
"Hyd, Absolon, thy tresses," in balade,  
That thou forgate hire<sup>1</sup> in thy song to sette.'

<sup>1</sup> Alcestis :

'good Alceste,  
The dayeseye, and myn owne hertes reste.'

Nor was it a less grave negligence to omit that lovely and melodious ballad from a volume of which it should have been one of the foremost ornaments. If Skelton's and Wyat's orthography may be modified or modernized, as assuredly it may without protest from any but the most horny-eyed and beetle-headed of pedants, so assuredly may Chaucer's. And it would have been of some little service to the common cause of good poetry and sound criticism if the duncery which regards or the impertinence which pretends to regard that beautiful form of verse as nothing better than a harmless exotic affectation of the present day or hour had been confronted with the fact that it is one of the numberless adaptations or adoptions from foreign models which our language owes to the father of modern English poetry. If the old French ballad form accepted by Chaucer so long before it attained its highest possible perfection of tragic or comic excellence, of humorous or pathetic expression, under the incomparable and inimitable touch of Villon is to be either patronized or rejected as an exotic of hothouse growth and artificial blossom, so must be the couplet, the stanza, the sonnet, the quatrain, and all other forms of rhyming verse in common use among English poets from the days of Chaucer to the days of Wordsworth. But it is useless to insist on such simple and palpable truths; for ignorance will never understand that knowledge is attainable, and impotence will never admit that ability may be competent. 'Do you suppose it is as easy to write a song as to write an epic?' said Béranger to Lucien Bonaparte. Nor would it be as easy for a most magnanimous mouse of a Calibanic poeticule to write a ballad, a roundel, or a virelai, after the noble

fashion of Chaucer, as to gabble at any length like a thing most brutish in the blank and blatant jargon of epic or idyllic stultiloquence.

The worst positive blemish—and a most fearful blemish it is—to be found in this generally graceful and careful collection will unluckily be found, and cannot be overlooked, on the fourth page. Sixth on the list of selected poems is a copy of verses attributed to Shakespeare—of all men on earth!—by the infamous pirate, liar, and thief who published a worthless little volume of stolen and mutilated poetry, patched up and padded out with dirty and dreary doggrel, under the senseless and preposterous title of *The Passionate Pilgrim*. It is here more plausibly ascribed, though on what authority I know not, to some scribbler—unknown to Shakespeare's contemporaries—who would seem to have signed himself Shakspere, and to have imagined that the gabble of geese or the chatter of apes was English and was verse.<sup>1</sup>

Happily there is here no second instance—but naturally there could not have been a second—of such amazing depravity in taste. If this execrable rubbish were cleared away, there might remain some debatable points for respectful and friendly discussion between fellow-students of English poetry: there would be little if anything to provoke or to necessitate any vehemence of protest or appeal.

It is of course questionable, and I certainly cannot

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce signum.* 'My curtail dog—with sighs so deep procures (*sic*) to weep in howling wise, to see my doleful plight. How sighs resound through heartless ground, like a thousand vanquished men in bloody fight!' Whether the poor creature's affliction were idiocy or lunacy would have been a matter for science to resolve.

pretend to decide the question, whether a volume of social or occasional verse ought to include any examples of sacred poetry in its lighter and brighter form. But there are such exquisitely and daintily beautiful examples of such poetry in earlier and in later English verse that I cannot but regret their absence from a collection which includes a pervert's pietistic and Romanistic gush of sentimental religiosity over the poetry of a saner and a sounder devotee. If this sort of sanctified stuff is admissible, with its fetid fragrance of priestly perfumery and its rancid relish of ecstatic or spasmodic excitement, why and how do we find not one single example of the many lovely songs which English poetry owes to an older and purer and wholesomer form of piety?

He came all so still  
Where his mother was  
As dew in Aprill  
That falleth on the grass.

He came all so still  
To his mother's bower  
As dew in Aprill  
That falleth on the flower.

He came all so still  
Where his mother lay  
As dew in Aprill  
That falleth on the spray.

I cannot but think that such lines as these—unspeakable in their loveliness they seem to my poor judgment—would have been fitter for a place in such a collection as this than any effusion of ‘beastly

Skelton' or sickly Crashaw. We do not indeed know that the author was an officially reverend poet or person: but even if he was but a secular songster, the fact remains that he has written the sweetest verses imaginable on a subject with which these two clerical writers could hardly have been trusted to deal by any one who might object to unfrocked and rampant ribaldry or to Catholic and apostolic erethism.

The first great age of our lighter lyric poetry was almost conterminous with the one great age of our tragic and romantic drama. From the song-books of Shakespeare's generation alone an anthology as large and as precious as the collection now before us might easily and quickly be compiled. This golden branch of English poetry is here so inadequately represented by a casual twig or an occasional spray that we could hardly contradict a reader who might complain that it had been utterly ignored. At no date was there so splendid a supply of serious or semi-serious occasional verse—so general a community of delicate grace and noble elegance among the minor poets of the day. And the general tone of this poetry was more in accordance with the taste and the instinct of our own time than that of any social or fashionable verse from the Restoration to the Regency—at least. It is light and bright as spray in sunshine, but no less clean and sweet: neither stiff and fulsome with the starch and perfumery of courtly verse under the patronage of Charles I., nor gross and greasy with the reek of Whitefriars or Whitehall under the auspices of Charles II. And the best verse of Carew is impaired by the barber-like suggestion of 'powders to enrich your hair:' and the finest song of

the Restoration is inadmissible on account of its bitter and cynical brutality. Perhaps, too, that famous effusion of pessimistic lechery which gives us in metrical form the moral quintessence of Calvin and Bacchus, of Priapus and Carlyle, may have been rejected as merely a metrical variation on the Carthusian theme—*Frère, il faut mourir*. It is of course impossible, and very justly and properly impossible—on the whole; yet, considering one or two things admitted, I hardly see, in spite of the obsolete slang and patriarchal vulgarity of the words 'bit' (for girl) and 'hogo' (for highly spiced dish), why this stanza should not have found place among others detached from their context which have been accepted as admissible.

Your most beautiful bit, that hath all eyes upon her,  
 Who her honesty sells for a hogo of honour,  
*Whose lightness and brightness doth shine in such splendour*  
*That none but the stars are thought fit to attend her,*  
 Though now she be pleasant, and sweet to the sense,  
 Will be damnably mouldy a hundred years hence.

It must have been a terrible Triboulet or Thersites who turned such an eye as the writer of these verses must have turned on the foundresses of ducal houses whose flourishing expansion bears witness to the charm and to the venality of a French or an English prostitute.

But though we may neither regret nor wonder at the exclusion of the grimmest and greatest of all erotic and Bacchanalian sermons in song, we may be allowed to regret that the two typical figures of the Restoration in its influence on lyric poetry should be rather inadequately than insufficiently represented. Dryden, the



greatest and most various representative of his age at its best and at its worst, is not for a moment comparable as a song-writer to Lord Rochester or to Mrs. Behn. And neither the plebeian poetess who sleeps in Westminster Abbey beside Abraham Cowley and Robert Browning (Poets' Corner—facetiously so called—is like poverty in its capacity for bringing strange bedfellows together), nor the patrician poet who divides with her the potential palm of supremacy in obscenity among all remembered writers of their race, is here represented by the best examples that might have been given of their abused and wasted genius. Like Marcus Cato's or Joseph Addison's Marcia, 'the virtuous Aphra towers above her sex' in the passionate grace and splendid elegance of that melodious and magnificent song ('Love in fantastic triumph sat') to which Leigh Hunt alone among critics has ever done justice—and has done no more than justice in the fervour of his impassioned panegyric. This would have been in every way a better and more appropriate example of her poetic power than the rather pretty, very proper, but rather feeble verses by which it is here misrepresented. But misrepresentation has been the lot of the virtuous Aphra ever since her hallowed dust gave additional consecration to the Pantheon of British bards—a Pantheon too exclusive to admit such godlings as Shakespeare or Milton, Coleridge or Wordsworth, Landor or Keats or Shelley. Anthony Trollope, in his exquisitely comical and conscientiously coxcombical autobiography, observes with contemptuous unction that he 'never read more detestable trash than the stories written by Mrs. Aphra Behn': and all

aders of Lockhart will remember that Sir Walter Scott's 'gay old grand-aunt' found it impossible to get through the very first of the stories which she had requested him to send her, remembering the pleasure with which in her girlhood she had heard them read aloud in the most decorous and refined society. The only one I remember to have ever read might, as far as I remember, be reprinted in company with Mrs. Beecher Stowe's and Lady Emily Hornblower's effusions of fiction or of song in behalf of 'the irrepressible nigger.' The tragic and pathetic story of Oronoko does only less credit to her excellent literary ability than to the noble impulse of womanly compassion and womanly horror which informs the whole narrative and makes of it one ardent and continuous appeal for sympathy and pity, one fervent and impassioned protest against cruelty and tyranny. The immaculate Calvinism of so fiery and so forcible a champion of slave-holding and slave-torture as Mr. Carlyle shows hardly to advantage beside the instinctive Christianity of a writer whose reputation is certainly very far from immaculate: and when Mr. Homer Wilbur, after citing 'a play of Mrs. Behn's,' excused himself for having done so by the reflection that 'even these kennels of literature may yield a fact or two to pay the raking,' so ardent an advocate of emancipation; Mr. Lowell might have remembered that this improper woman of genius was the first literary abolitionist—the first champion of the slave on record in the history of fiction; in other words, in the history of creative literature.

Whigs and Puritans have brought many charges and laid many impeachments against the Restoration:

Tories and Jacobites have had to allow that there was but too much ground for too many of them : Scott and Macaulay are found for once in agreement on certain points regarding the literary and political record of that singular period. Two of its offences, in my humble opinion, are specially and supremely unpardonable : the humiliation of the English before the Dutch—an infamy unparalleled in our history till the advent into power of a party beside which even the Cabal itself seems something less than infamous—and the moral murder of so rare a genius as Rochester's. Victims of vanity and lechery are seldom worth regret : but this hapless pupil of the Puritans, hounded as he was by false shame and foolish emulation into such inconceivable eccentricities of literary and personal debauchery, was born for so different a fate and so different a record, had not his evil star intervened to thwart it, that no one who realizes what he might and should have been can ever think of the poet or the man without a thrill or a pang of pity. The gallant young volunteer who distinguished himself even among English sailors and soldiers as the hero of a sea-fight drank himself into cowardice, and truckled to a challenger as a Russo-Radical of our own day would truckle to any enemy who might assist him in the degradation of his country : the noble and thoughtful poet who might have beaten all competitors<sup>1</sup> out of the field became such a rhymester as Plato might have excepted from the sentence of expulsion—surely in other cases a superfluous sentence—pronounced

<sup>1</sup> Dryden, as controversialist and satirist, could of course have had no competitor ; but there is, I must repeat, a purer lyrical note in Rochester's best verse than in the best of his.

against poets who might find themselves within the limits of a republic from which Platonic love had excluded the incongruous and obsolete influence of woman. But it is somewhat hard that he should not have the benefit of his genius at its best : and though the two samples of it given here are good enough to be set beside those given of Sir Charles Sedley's—a genuine but inferior humourist and poet, only not quite so deeply tainted by the 'fat pollutions' of their time—they are not nearly so good as a light and tender and harmless love-song which has found place in other collections and should not have been excluded from this.

The austerest or most knowing of young persons will hardly feel the blush of virtue mount to the cheek of discretion on reading the samples given from these writers of ill fame ; but one of those given from a greater author (though assuredly not from a greater poet) of the next generation might not inconceivably succeed in producing that cosmetic effect. Congreve's lines on Chloe are excellent in their way, but if the impudent grace of epigram is to excuse or to extenuate its graceless impudence, why should the more famous and hardly more audacious lines on Doris be excluded ? It would perhaps have been better, I am puritanical and prudish enough to think, if this great name had been here represented only by the not more faultless than blameless verses on fair Amoret—a model of delicate and high-bred satire.

There is no more unaccountable omission in this volume than that of Pope's little pearl of price,

I know a thing that's most uncommon  
(Envy, be silent, and attend !)—

The exquisite simplicity of this lyrical compliment—

*simplex munditiis* if ever a poem was—makes of it a gem of even finer water than any here given from the hand of the same jeweller.

With Prior no poet could well have gone wrong, and Mr. Locker-Lampson has gone admirably and inevitably right. But the perfection of taste and tact displayed in the discharge of such a task as the presentation of Swift at his best, and of Swift in the fulness of his powers, to the modern reader of either sex and any possible age—and this without hint or suspicion of offence—is notable alike for simplicity, for dexterity, and for daring. Two poems in which the genius of Aristophanes shakes hands with the genius of Dickens—for Swift has revived the one and anticipated the other in his exquisite abuse of language and his delicious perversion of proper names—*Hamilton's Bawn* and *Mrs. Harris's Petition* are now, by the slightest and most delicate of touches, made accessible to all lovers of the rarest humour and the most resplendent wit: we only miss Mary the cookmaid's not less wonderful and delightful letter to Dr. Sheridan. In that instance there would have been no need of any excision: but had there been we might gratefully and confidently have intrusted the part of Bowdler to the instinctive good sense, the manly and rational delicacy, of the present editors. That this should ever be a thankless part to play in any case of obvious or apparent necessity reflects less than little credit on the taste and judgment of those whose objections or whose ridicule would make it so. More nauseous and more foolish cant was never chattered than that which would deride the memory or depreciate the merits of Bowdler. No man ever did better service to Shakespeare than the man who

made it possible to put him into the hands of intelligent and imaginative children : it may well be, if we consider how dearly the creator of Mamillius must have loved them, that no man has ever done him such good service. Indeed, I could wish to borrow the pencil or the pen which struck out of his text whatever was unfit for such readers, and strike out of the volume before me an insignificant if not a too significant pastoral on the interview of a faithful young Thyrsi, with his dear Luey, and the Greuze-like lyric which celebrates the misadventure of an Irish Mlle de la Cruche-cassée. These two, it seems to my possibly too squeamish and censorious apprehension, would find their more appropriate place in a *Lyra Pauciarum*. Or if such as these be found admissible, I hardly see by what critical canon of aesthetics or of ethics we can be bound or free to pass sentence of exclusion against a poem so far superior to these as Nat Lee's most musical and most graceful bridal song, 'Blush not redder than the morning.'

But even when the real or imaginary merits of the pseudo-pastoral school are—in the immortal phrase of Mr. Podsnap—combined with an absence of anything calculated to bring a blush to the cheek of a young person, a poem of that school is very seldom worthy of such promotion as is here accorded, for instance, to the stale and silly doggrel of such songsters as Garriek. One of the obscurest among his contemporaries—Richard Jago, the admiring friend of Shenstone—has supplied two little stanzas worth a bushel of Strephoniana ; their pretty simplicity and instinctive sincerity of accent are not more exceptionally remarkable than their happy point and neatness of terse expression. And from Peter P'ndar,

of all writers in the world, we get a really graceful and almost pathetic touch<sup>1</sup> by way of close to a song (by a person of no quality) in the mild Arcadian style.

The lyrical genius of Collins and of Blake, our two greatest poets of the century in which they were born, flies usually too high in air too clear and splendid for the highest flight possible to merely elegant verse of the occasional sort: yet I can hardly think it would have been presumptuous or unbecoming to glorify this volume by the inclusion of two poems so conspicuous for their exaltation of elegance in style no less than of delicacy or tenderness in fancy as the melodious lament for Fidele and the majestic address to the Muses.

Opinion and taste will be likelier or more certain to vary among students and lovers of occasional verse as their study brings them nearer their own time. There is certainly much to commend, as there is also not a little to regret, in the very miscellaneous selection here given from the social poetry of the nineteenth century. What first struck the present reader on glancing through it was the too obvious and damaging fact that there was by no means enough of Peacock to so much of Praed. Even in social verse as defined by Mr. Austin Dobson and the *Times* reviewer who has the honour to be cited in the preface to this pleasant volume we look—at its very best—for more spirit and versatility of life, more warmth of touch, more fulness of tone, more vigour and variety of impulse than we find in Praed at his. After reading, with sincere pleasure and real admiration, two three of those charming little pieces whose genuine

<sup>1</sup> 'The wounded tree  
Is all that will remember me.'

and high-bred elegance is most evidently inimitable when confronted with the servile vulgarity of their more abject and impotent imitators, we are nevertheless conscious that this gracefulest and readiest of performers has after all but one string to his fiddle. The riper and richer humour of Peacock, as superior to Praed's as dry champagne to sweet, or a Sultana grape to a green gooseberry, is excellently well represented by the masterly and generous satire of *Rich and Poor, or Saint and Sinner*; his deeper and sweeter gift of grave and tender song, by the matchless elegiac idyl of *Youth and Age*. But how came the editors to throw away for the second time—repeating the unhappy exploit of the diving friar—‘the stone of all stones, the philosopher’s stone’? And how could they ignore the incomparable raiding song which registers for all time the difference between mountain sheep and valley sheep? And if, in the teeth of a promise given or an engagement implied in the preface, a place was to be found for such mean and pitiful parodies as disfigure two or three of these pages, how on earth did they come to overlook the quintessence of Byron as distilled by Peacock into the two consummate stanzas which utter or exhale the lyric agony of Mr. Cypress?

Byron himself is not badly represented by the famous parting address to Tom Moore, and still better by the spirited bluster and vigorous ring of the stanzas on the Lisbon Packet: though even as here modified (by the not very plausible substitution, for instance, of a heathen for a sacred name, and a ‘hang’ for a big big D), their elegance is not quite so evident as their rollicking energy of improvisation or the swinging dance and suggestive roll of the happily appropriate metre. If, like Shelley’s



Peter Bell, I may borrow an illustration from far-off memories of otherwise barren hours passed principally in profound inattention to lectures on Aldrich's Logic, I would suggest that, as coarseness is contrary, vulgarity is contradictory to elegance: just as in politics the monarchical principle is contrary, but the principle—if any such principle there be—of disunionism, dissolutionism, or communalism (barbarous terms expressive of a barbarous impolicy) is contradictory to the republican principle. Coarseness of a certain kind is as compatible—witness much Greek, much Latin, much French, much Italian and a little English poetry—with literary elegance of a certain kind as the monarchical form with the republican principle which makes even royalists talk of the commonwealth of England: vulgarity of any kind is as incompatible with elegance of any kind as is the republican principle with the disintegrating instinct of Parisian anarchists or Irish reactionaries: and he who could reconcile these could assuredly and easily

make the inexorable asymptote  
Close like fond lips.<sup>1</sup>

Dryden, for example, is very often coarse: but Dryden is very seldom vulgar. Byron is seldom very coarse: but Byron is often very vulgar. It is the difference between the generation whose ideal type was Rochester and the generation whose ideal type was Brummell.

The melodious stanzas to Augusta might surely have found here a place—with or without the closing verses (unaccountably omitted from the current editions of Byron) which are hardly necessary to explain and justify

<sup>1</sup> Sydney Dobell; *Balder*, Scene xxviii.

the enthusiastic admiration of that most exquisite critic Edgar Poe for the metrical perfection of that most mellifluous poem—usually and prematurely broken off short after the fourth of the following sweet lines.

In the desert a fountain is springing,  
*In the wide waste there still is a tree,*  
 And a bird in the solitude singing  
 Which speaks to my spirit of thee.

Thou thought'st verses like these could be scanned—which  
 Was absurd, but uncommonly kind :  
 Thou said'st each stanza was not a sandwich  
 Of blank prose and rank doggrel combined :  
 Thou found'st out some strange sort of sweet fitness  
 In the rhythms mauled and mangled by me :  
 And such ears, I take Midas to witness,  
 Belong but to donkeys and thee.

Parodies, we are given to understand in the preface, have been generally rejected as alien from the scope of this work. Even had they been generally accepted as germane to it, we should hardly have expected to come across anything so pert and poor as Miss Fanshawe's abortive imitation of Wordsworth—a poet who seems easier to parody than he is, and has never to my knowledge been successfully caricatured or burlesqued—except perhaps once by Landor.

Speaking of Wordsworth, by the way, I must take occasion to express my wonder and regret at missing that most gracious and delightful poem, *The Kitten and the Falling Leaves* : which would here have been doubly acceptable, as one of the finest and most appropriate that could possibly have been chosen to enhance the

value of such a collection, and as a natural companion for Joanna Baillic's only less charming address *To a Kitten*, here given in condensed or concentrated form.

But what, in the name of the Graces! what shall be said when we come across—of all dreary horrors on this God's earth!—a cockney music-hall sort of parody on Poe's everlasting *Raven*? Surely this is the very nadir of inelegance. Almost as bad and almost as vulgar is Hood's burlesque of Moore: indeed, except for the ever delightful and admirable verses 'composed at Rotterdam,' Hood is only less inadequately and unfavourably represented than Barham. There is certainly not too little, as the editors seem to think, of the monstrously overrated and preposterously overpraised C. S. Calverley: a jester, graduate or undergraduate, may be fit enough to hop, skip and tumble before university audiences, without capacity to claim an enduring or even a passing station among even the humblest of English humourists. Even more out of place in such good company is the weary and wearisome laureate of Oxonicules and Bostonicles, Mr. Lowell's realized ideal and chosen representative of English poetry at its highest in the generation of Tennyson and Browning; whose message to his generation may be summed up as follows:

We've got no faith, and we don't know what to do:

To think one can't believe a creed because it isn't true!<sup>1</sup>

Literary history will hardly care to remember or to register the fact that there was a bad poet named Clough, whom his friends found it useless to puff: for the public,

<sup>1</sup> Et certamen erat, Corydon cum Thyrside, parvum.

if dull, has not quite such a skull as belongs to believers in Clough.

A poet of a very different order, and of taste perhaps too reckless and style too defiant of academic regulation and culture, might have been more happily represented by two most graceful little posthumous poems, *Any's Cruelty* and *May's Love*, than by that rather sour sample of womanly jocularity called *A Man's Requirements*, or by the much too serious and sentimental *Romance of the Swan's Nest*. The compilers of the volume may very naturally have been tempted to strain a point so as to admit some specimen from the hand of the most potent if by no means the most perfect of English poetesses: but in that case they would have done much better, in my humble opinion, to select the beautiful and simple memorial stanzas, so light and soft in movement, so grave and tender in emotion, which give so perfect and so sweet a picture of the typical English girl whom Mrs. Browning has made lovable and memorable for ever as *My Kate*.

The reader who comes in the list of contents upon the illustrious name of Edward Fitzgerald will doubtless be not a little taken aback when confronted with a bearer of that name so ludicrously and lamentably unworthy to be the namesake of the man whose shy audacity of diffident and daring genius has given Omar Kháyyám a place for ever among the greatest of English poets. That the very best of his exquisite poetry, the strongest and serenest wisdom, the sanest and most serious irony, the most piercing and the profoundest radiance of his gentle and sublime philosophy, belong as much or more to Suffolk than to Shiraz, has been, if I mistake not, an

open secret for many years—‘and,’ as Dogberry says, ‘it will go near to be thought so shortly.’ Every quatrain, though it is something so much more than graceful or distinguished or elegant, is also, one may say, the sublimation of elegance, the apotheosis of distinction, the transfiguration of grace : perfection of style can go no further and rise no higher, as thought can pierce no deeper and truth can speak no plainer, than in the crowning stanza which of course would have found itself somewhat out of place beside even the gravest and the loftiest poem (Mrs. Barbauld’s immortal lines on life, old age, and death) admitted or admissible into such a volume as this.

Oh Thou, who man of baser earth didst make,  
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake,  
For all the sin wherewith the face of man  
Is blackened, man’s forgiveness give—and take !

It is of work like this that his countrymen will always think when they hear the immortal name of the workman : and none will ever confound its author with the puny secondhand rhymester,<sup>1</sup> whose cheap and chirruping doggrel is almost as much beneath the lowest as any quatrain of Omar is above the highest level of such verse as we expect to find in such company as the present.

Another great name here somewhat wofully misrepresented is that of Thackeray ; whose *White Squall*

<sup>1</sup> But that his highly respectable name or names would appear to have been William Thomas, I should assuredly have taken this Edward to be the Fitzgerald to whom—at second hand—we owe the statement and the solution of the historic problem—

‘ Who fills the butchers’ shops with large blue flies ? ’

is now and then rather too provocative of such emotions as nature's might provoke in the digestive economy of a bad sailor. To make the gorge rise at it is hardly the sign or the property of elegance in verse: and if indecency, which means nothing more than unseemliness, is very properly considered as a reason for excluding from elegant society the most brilliant examples of the most illustrious writers ever touched by so much as a passing shade of it, the rule should be applied equally to every variety of the repulsive and the unbecoming—not by any means only to matters of sexual indecorum and erotic indelicacy. To none of the other selections from the lighter work of the same illustrious hand is any such objection or suggestion applicable: but not one of them shows Thackeray at his very best as a comic poet. *The Battle of the Baltic* and *The Battle of the Shannon* are two masterpieces of lyric narrative, the one triumphant in tragedy, the other transcendent in comedy: each of them supreme, inimitable, matchless, and unmatchable of its kind for ever. Immortality beyond the reach of any other or later Hibernian who has ever sought or found his last refuge in patriotism is assuredly the lot of 'Immortal Smith O'Brine' and 'Young Meagher of the Sword': O for one hour of their poet! we might exclaim—if we had not with us so admirable a substitute and so competent a rival in patriotic humour and lyric laughter of witty loyalty as Mr. Graves,—to sing for us the veracity and purity of a Parnell, the pusillanimous magnanimity or the servile indignation of O'Briens far meaner and more ludicrous than poor Smith! This delicious little masterpiece cannot evidently have been excluded as a sample of the 'satirical or political squibs'

which, if we may believe the preface, 'have been generally rejected': or how comes it that we find admitted the less brilliant and more polemical squibs or crackers exploded by the philocatholic whiggery of Macaulay and Tom Moore? These, however, might be allowed to pass as undoubtedly successful in a thinner and more ephemeral style of satire: but surely the worse than hackneyed jocularly of the *Anti-Jacobin*, however excellent of its rough and ready kind, is here most vilely out of place. It is something above and beyond all realized conceptions of incongruity to hoist the flag of 'no politics' and pass the watchword of 'no parodies,' and then to salute the reader with a broadside of brutality and burlesque, a discharge of mildewed mockery and fly-blown caricature, from the social or political battery of Messrs. Canning and Frere. And what delirious aberration of tasteless caprice can possibly have suggested the admission of a 'doggerel epithalamium by Croker—of all scribblers on record!—into the very last niche of this radiant and harmonious gallery of song? 'You have a great name of your own'—'But I may be allowed to confess'—here is proper lyric stuff to wind up with! There is a due conformity of cadence and of style in these twenty villainous lines which should have sufficed to exclude them from any collection above the literary level of an old annual—*Gem*, *Keepsake*, or *Souvenir*. O Sminthian Apollo! what a malodorous mouse to nail up on the hinder door of such a gracious little chapel, under the very nose as it were of the departing choir!

Were but this unutterably miserable rubbish once duly struck out and swept away, the close of a beautiful volume would be beautiful and appropriate beyond all

praise or thanks. There are loftier sonnets in the language, there is no lovelier sonnet in the world, than the late Lord Rosslyn's *Bed-time*. 'It gives a very echo to the seat where love is throned'—the painless and stainless love of little children. Landor might and would, for all his fantastic and factitious abhorrence of their form, have given a place to this divine sonnet and its coequal companion in a truly blessed immortality, Mr. Tennyson-Turner's on *Letty's Globe*, in his list of exceptions to the common rule or the conventional axiom which denies that any work of man's can ever be absolutely perfect. A volume closing upon verses so divine as these would be closed by every reader with a sense of fragrance in his nostrils and of honey on his tongue. I trust and think it is no mere prejudice of sympathetic or patriotic prepossession which rather impels than inclines me to believe that such a close would have been less characteristically appropriate to any such anthology of this especial kind as might have been gathered from the very sweetest and sunniest garden of any other language and any other poetry than our own.



*WILKIE COLLINS.*

THE ingratitude of kings and the ingratitude of democracies have often supplied the text of historic or political sermons : the ingratitude of readers and spectators, from Shakespeare's day to our own, is at least as notable and memorable. A man who has amused our leisure, relieved our weariness, delighted our fancy, enthralled our attention, refreshed our sympathies, cannot claim a place of equal honour in our grateful estimation with the dullest or the most perverse of historians who ever falsified or stupefied history, of metaphysicians who ever 'darkened counsel' and wasted time and wearied attention by the profitless lucubrations of pseudosophy. To create is nothing : to comment is much. The commentary may be utterly hollow and rotten, the creation thoroughly solid and alive : the one is nothing less than criticism, the other nothing more than fiction. 'Un âne qui ressemble à monsieur Nisard' takes precedence, in the judgment of his kind, of the men on whose works, inventive or creative, it is the business of a Nisard to pass judgment and to bray.

Some few students, whose levity or perversity is duly derided and deplored by the Nisards of our time, are of opinion that the age of Shakespeare is well worth studying even in the minor productions of his day and the

hapless young husband is a rather pathetic if a rather incredible figure. But the vindictive paramour is somewhat too much of a stage property; and the book would hardly be remembered for better or for worse if the author had not in his future stories excelled its merits and eschewed its faults. Nor would *Hide and Seek*, though a most ingenious and amusing story, have had much chance of a life as long as it deserves if it had been the best that its teller had to tell. But in *The Dead Secret* Willie Collins made his mark for the first time as a writer who could do something that no one else could—and something well worth doing. The skill of the plot, the construction, and the narrative, whatever such skill may be worth, was far beyond the reach of any contemporary, however far above him in the loftier and clearer qualities of genius. Dickens never wrote and Thackeray never tried to write a story so excellent in construction and so persistent in its hold on the reader's curiosity—a curiosity amounting, in the case of its younger and more impressible readers, to absolute anxiety. But, good as it is, this book is the first among many examples of the too undeniable and characteristic fact that the remarkable genius of its author for invention and construction and composition of incidents and effects was limited by an incapacity and dependent on a condition which cannot but be regarded as seriously impairing his claims to consideration as an artist or a student. He could not, as a rule, get forward at all without the help of some physical or moral infirmity in some one of the leading agents or patients of the story. Neither *The Dead Secret* nor *The Woman in White* could have run its course for a single volume if Sarah Leeson or

Collins which we remember with pleasure are works of art as true as his godfather's pictures, and in their own line as complete. His excellent sense, his perfect self-command, his modest devotion to his art, are qualities not more praiseworthy than they are obvious. And if it were but for their rarity they should command no less attention than respect. His most illustrious friend and contemporary did not always show himself at once so loyal and so rational in observance of intellectual or æsthetic propriety. Collins never ventured to fling down among his readers so shapeless or misshapen a piece of work, though doubtless he could not furnish them with a piece of work so splendid and so excellent in parts and sections, as *Little Dorrit*. Dickens, with his usual straightforward dexterity, laid hold of the objection absurdly raised against the catastrophe of *Little Dorrit* by the carpers who averred that it must have been suggested by an actual accident which occurred just before the close of the periodical publication of his story: he pointed out the intimations conveyed again and again of just such an unforeseen peril in the earlier stages of the story—in numbers which had appeared many months before; and he most satisfactorily and triumphantly stamped out that most fatuous and preposterous suggestion. But he did not prove or even try to prove it possible for his most devoted admirer to believe that when he began the story he meant that so much of it should finally be left hanging in the air; that a figure so admirably and so carefully outlined as that of a malignant 'self-tormentor' should have been intended to justify and expound herself by putting into the hands of a stranger to whom she had conceived a rather

virulent antipathy the unsolicited and unexplained revelation of her poisoned nature and her cankered life ; or that the ill-mated pair whose miserable tragedy had been so darkly foreshadowed and so elaborately sketched in should have been left in the simply uncomfortable condition to which the great novelist, overburdened with an inartistic multiplicity of episodical and incoherent interests, was finally content to condemn them by default. A writer may let his characters slip for the sake of his story, or he may let his story slip for the sake of his characters : Dickens, in *Little Dorrit*, fell alternately into both errors, and yet achieved such success on both lines that the chaotic magnificence of his work may well be held sufficient to strike even the most rational and rightful criticism into silence. Such triumph and such aberration were alike impossible to Collins ; the most plausible objection that could be brought against his best books was that the study of character and the modesty of nature must too surely have been subordinated, if not sacrificed, to the exquisitely mechanical ingenuity of so continuously intricate a plot. And now and then it would certainly seem as if the writer had been struck, and had possibly been irritated, by an apprehension that he might be regarded as a mere mechanic or mechanist of fiction, and had been impelled by this apprehension into some not always fortunate or felicitous attempt to relieve the weight of his story and heighten the tone of his work with somewhat crude and over-coloured effects of character or caricature. But it seems to me grossly and glaringly unjust to deny or to question the merit or the truthfulness of his better studies. By far the best the most thoughtful, serious, and critical article

that appeared on the occasion of his death, fair and good as it was in the main, may be cited in example of this injustice. Count Fosco, said the critic, stands revealed as a mechanical nonentity, an ingenious invention never realized or vitalized or informed with humanity by the inventor, who felt at last that he had failed to make a living man of him ; the proof of this being simply that at the close of the story two or three different explanations of his conduct and his character are suggested as equally plausible and acceptable. This would be a quite unimpeachable objection if the story had been told in the third person ; but such too intelligent criticism overlooks the fact that it is not. The author does not tell us what he thinks of his creature ; he gives us the various impressions made on the fellow-creatures of his imagination by the influence or the impact of this particular figure. And the consequence is that we see there are more ways of considering and estimating a man's character than a meaner artist could have suggested or conceived. And the author's especial genius is never more distinctly displayed or more happily employed than in the exposition and the contrast of such varying estimates of character or explanations of event. At the opening of the story which seems to be generally regarded as the masterpiece of his art, we are warned by the worthy old steward who first takes up the narrative to believe nothing that may be said of him by a lady whose recollections and reflections are to follow on the record of his own ; and when the Evangelical hag who is one of her creator's most thoroughly and simply successful creations takes up the tale in turn, and sets forth her opinions as to the past and the present and

the future of her friends and neighbours, we find that her view of life and character is as dramatically just and appropriate—from the opposite point of view—as his. It is apparently the general opinion—an opinion which seems to me incontestable—that no third book of their author's can be ranked as equal with *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*: two works of not more indisputable than incomparable ability. *No Name* is an only less excellent example of as curious and original a talent. It is more elaborately ingenious, but less thoroughly successful, than the finest work of the first Lord Lytton—a story grounded on the same motive, and starting from the same point; the imputation of illegitimacy, the struggle against its consequences, and the final triumph over its disadvantages. But there is nothing—though much is good—so good in the work of the later novelist as the character of Gawtrey; nor anything so effective and impressive as his end.

In this story the complication and alternation of interests and incidents are carried as far as they can reasonably be carried: in *Armadale* they are carried further. That curious and laborious romance must be considered, even by those who cannot consider it successful, as a failure which fell short on the verge of a success. The prologue or prelude is so full of interest and promise that the expectations of its readers may have been unduly stimulated; but the sequel, astonishingly ingenious and inventive as it is, is scarcely perhaps in perfect keeping with the anticipations thus ingeniously aroused. To the average reader, judging by my own impressions, I should imagine that the book must on the whole be a little disappointing; but such a reader

should ask himself whether this impression of disappointment is reasonable. The criminal heroine who dies of her own will by her own crime, to save the beloved victim whom it has accidentally brought to the verge of death, is a figure which would have aroused the widest and the deepest sympathy of English readers if only she had not been the creation of an Englishman. Had a Frenchman or an American introduced her, no acclamation would have been too vehement to express their gratitude. The signature of Nathaniel Hawthorne or of Octave Feuillet would have sufficed to evoke a rapture of regret that England could produce no such novelist as this. But neither Feuillet nor Hawthorne could have composed and constructed such a story: the ingenuity spent on it may possibly be perverse, but it is certainly superb. And the studies of character are fair; the fortunate and amiable young hero and heroine may be rather incredibly boyish and girlish, but the two somewhat loathsome figures of the Pedgifts are as good as any studies of ugly dotage in a father and hideous depravity in a son can be made by any dexterity of arrangement to be or to appear. But the web of the story is perhaps too dense; the web is perhaps too tightly drawn, and the threads of it are perhaps not always harmonious in colour. The superb success of *The Moonstone* may perhaps make even his most cordial admirers unconsciously if not ungratefully unjust to the less unquestionable and the less unqualified successes of its author; just as any one who has thoroughly enjoyed Lord Digby's incomparable *Elvira*—the one dramatic work in the language which may be said to have anticipated the peculiarly lucid method, and the peculiarly careful evolution of a most amusingly

complicated story, which we admire in the best works of Wilkie Collins—will find himself disqualified from enjoying Sir Samuel Tuke's *Adventures of Five Hours*; even when he remembers that the recollection of the latter play, recently witnessed on the stage, made Mr. Samuel Pepys reflect after seeing *Othello*—a play which he was wont to think well of—that, 'having so lately seen *The Adventures of Five Hours*, it do seem but a mean thing.' In *Elvira*, as in *The Moonstone*, the skill of construction is so exquisite, so complete, so masterly, that we follow the thread of the story with unflagging enjoyment and a perpetually changeful and delightful perplexity of conjecture as to what the upshot is to be; and when this upshot comes it is all that sympathy could have desired, and more than ingenuity could have conceived. Lord Digby lives—if he can be said to live—by grace of his *Elvira* alone, and for fewer readers, I fear, than he seems to me to deserve; there are many, I believe, who think that Wilkie Collins would have a likelier chance of longer life in the memories of more future readers if he had left nothing behind him but his masterpiece *The Moonstone* and the one or two other stories which may fairly be set beside or but a little beneath it. A man who has written much after writing a book of indisputably great merit in its way, and has never again written anything of merit so indisputable and so great, is apt to be thought all the less of on that account; but if these comparatively inferior works have any real and indisputable merit of their own, they surely ought rather to be set down to his credit than to his discredit. And if no good judge of fiction—in other words, of that creative art which alone can entitle a man to be called,



not a discoverer or inventor, a commentator or a thinker, but a maker—will affirm that any later work of this able and loyal workman is so good as not to disappoint us when we compare it with *The Moonstone*, none will deny the real and great merit of this later work at its best. And few will differ, I should think, from the suggestion that the inferiority or imperfection which we cannot ignore or deny in it was due to the lamentable illusion of which most unquestionably there are no traces in his earlier work—work which was always modestly, straightforwardly, and thoroughly loyal to the intellectual dictates of his instinct and the intelligent rules of his art. This illusion was the benevolent and maleficent fancy—the ‘devout imagination’—that he might do good service, as Dickens had done and was doing, in the line of didactic fiction and reformatory romance. The shades of Mr. Bumble, Mr. Fang, Mr. Nupkins, Mr. Squeers, Mr. Alderman Cute, Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Creakle, Mr. Kenge, Mr. Vholes, Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Gradgrind, Mr. Merdle, and I know not how many more immortals, may well have disturbed the literary rest of their great creator’s friend and disciple; but that was an evil day for his genius on which he bethought himself to try his hand at the correction of abuses, the castigation of follies, and the advocacy of reforms. It is as noble a work as man can undertake, to improve the conditions of life for other men by writing or by speaking or by example; but in the two former cases, if a man has not the requisite capacity, even the most generous volunteer in the army of progress or reform will be likelier to lose his own way than to lead other men back into theirs.

The first and best of Wilkie Collins's didactic or admonitory novels is so brilliant in exposition of character, so dexterous in construction of incident, so happy in evolution of event, that its place is nearer the better work which preceded than the poorer work which followed it. The subject of marriage law in Scotland is one which it is painfully difficult for any one who has read the most exhaustingly delightful and the most unmercifully side-splitting of all farcical comedies to consider as suggestive of serious or tragic interest. Belinda and her Belvawney, Cheviot and his Minnie, rise up again before the eyes of enraptured if incredulous fancy, in the light—or should we say limelight?—of inextinguishable and irrepressible laughter: and the woes and wrongs of any couple accidentally or otherwise mismarried on the wrong side of the Border are inevitably invested with a lambent halo of ridicule—an ineffaceable aureole of farce. But if Mr. Gilbert had never written *Engaged* (Momus forbid the lamentable fancy!), it might still be possible to follow the fortunes of the singularly frail and singularly stout-hearted heroine of *Man and Wife* with no sense of incongruity or comicality in the mainspring of the action which directs them: and it is still possible to regret the unexplained if not inexplicable incongruity between the physical or moral weakness which could yield up honour and character to the seduction or attraction of a brainless and soulless brute, and the moral and physical courage which could inspire and sustain the devotion of his victim when aware that her self-sacrifice for the sake of others must expose her to the imminent peril of suffering and terror worse than death. The satire on muscle-worship, though neither unprovoked

nor unmerited, might have gained in point and force if the method of attack had been a trifle less heavy-handed. The great objection to the muscular Christians and ethical professors of athleticism, as was once remarked by an undergraduate of my acquaintance, is that they are so unhealthily conscious of their unconscious healthiness. But the satirical or controversial note in this book, if not too finely touched, is touched more finely than those which the author attempted to strike in some of his subsequent works. *The New Magdalen* is merely feeble, false, and silly in its sentimental cleverness ; but in *The Fallen Leaves* there is something too absurdly repulsive for comment or endurance. The extreme clumsiness and infelicity of Wilkie Collins as a dramatic teacher or preacher may be tested by comparison with the exquisite skill and tact displayed by M. Alexandre Dumas in his studies of the same or of similar subjects. To the revoltingly ridiculous book just mentioned I am loth to refer again : all readers who feel any gratitude or goodwill towards its author must desire to efface its miserable memory from the record of his works. But take even the comparatively successful *New Magdalen* and set it, for instance, beside *Les Idées de Mme Aubray* : it is as the scratching of a savage or a child to the drawing of an all but impeccable artist. Even *Une Visite de Noces*, though not exactly a lovely or a lofty study of noble manners and elevated life, is saved by the author's astonishing gift of dexterity in presentation, 'that can make vile things precious' : whereas Mr. Collins, if only by overstating his case, destroys any pathos or plausibility that might otherwise be fancied or be found in it. To the mealy-mouthed modern philopornist the

homely and hardy method of the old poet who first discovered or invented the penitent prostitute may seem rough and brutal in its lifelike straightforwardness : but to the wiser eye *Bellafront* is worth a shoal of her successors in that line of sentimental fiction which provokes from weary humanity the bitter cry of the long-suffering novel-reader : When will the last reformed harlot vanish into space in the arms of the last clerical sceptic—*Mercy Merrick* and *Robert Elsmere* destroy each other in a fiery embrace, or in such a duel as that between the prince, and the Ifrit, which ended in mutual annihilation ?

Less offensive if not less irrational, more amusing if not more convincing, was the childish and harmless onslaught on scientific research attempted if not achieved by the simple-minded and innocent author of *Heart and Science*. The story which bears that most remarkably silly title is the best—after *Man and Wife*, and a good way after—of all its writer's moral or didactic tales. There is a capital child in it, for one thing ; her experiences of Scottish life and character, as related on the occasion of her last appearance, are nothing less than delicious.

Carmina could have Zo all to herself. 'Now, my dear,' she said, in a kiss, 'tell me about Scotland.'

'Scotland,' Zo answered with dignity, 'belongs to Uncle Northlake. He pays for everything : and I'm Missus.'

'It's true,' said Mr. Gallilee, bursting with pride. 'My lord says it's no use having a will of your own where Zo is. When he introduces her to anybody on the estate, he says, "Here's the Missus."'

Mr. Gallilee's youngest daughter listened critically to the parental testimony. 'You see he knows,' she said to Ovid. 'There's nothing to laugh at.'

Carmina tried another question. 'Did you think of me, dear, when you were far away?'

'Think of you?' Zo repeated. 'You're to sleep in my bedroom when we go back to Scotland—and I'm to be out of bed, and one of 'em, when you eat your first Scotch dinner. Shall I tell you what you'll see on the table? You'll see a big brown steaming bag in a dish—and you'll see me slit it with a knife—and the bag's fat inside will tumble out, all smoking hot and stinking. That's a Scotch dinner. Oh!' she cried, losing her dignity in the sudden interest of a new idea, 'oh, Carmina, do you remember the Italian boy, and his song?'

Here was one of those tests of her memory for trifles, applied with a child's happy abruptness, for which Ovid had been waiting. He listened eagerly. To his unutterable relief, Carmina laughed.

'Of course I remember it!' she said. 'Who could forget the boy who sings and grins and says *Gimnee haypenny*?'

'That's it!' cried Zo. 'The boy's song was a good one in its way. I've learnt a better in Scotland. You've heard of Donald, haven't you?'

'No.'

Zo turned indignantly to her father. 'Why didn't you tell her of Donald?'

Mr. Gallilee humbly admitted that he was in fault. Carmina asked who Donald was, and what he was like. Zo unconsciously tested her memory for the second time.

'You know that day,' she said, 'when Joseph had an errand at the grocer's and I went along with him, and Miss Minerva said I was a vulgar child?'

Carmina's memory recalled this new trifle, without an effort. 'I know,' she answered; 'you told me Joseph and the grocer weighed you in the great scales.'

Zo delighted Ovid by trying her again.

'When they put me into the scales, Carmina, what did I weigh?'

'Nearly four stone, dear.'

'Quite four stone. Donald weighs fourteen. What do you think of that?'

Mr. Gallilee once more offered his testimony. 'The biggest Piper on my lord's estate,' he began, 'comes of a Highland family, and was removed to the Lowlands by my lord's father. A great player——'

'And my friend,' Zo explained, stopping her father in full career. 'He takes snuff out of a cow's horn. He shovels it up his fat nose with a spoon, like this. His nose wags. He says, "Try my sneeshin." Sneeshin's Scotch for snuff. He boos till he's nearly double when Uncle Northlake speaks to him. Boos is Scotch for bows. He skirls on the pipes—skirls means screeches. When you first hear him, he'll make your stomach ache. You'll get used to that—and you'll find you like him. He wears a purse and a petticoat; he never had a pair of trousers on in his life; there's no pride about him. Say you're my friend, and he'll let you smack his legs——'

Here Ovid was obliged to bring the biography of Donald to a close. Carmina's enjoyment of Zo was becoming too keen for her strength; her bursts of laughter grew louder and louder—the wholesome limit of excitement was being rapidly passed. 'Tell us about your cousins,' he said, by way of effecting a diversion.

'The big ones?' Zo asked.

'No, the little ones, like you.'

'Nice girls—they play at everything I tell 'em. Jolly boys—when they knock a girl down, they pick her up again, and clean her.'

Her father, too, is good; her mother is merely a 'shocking example.' Not quite so much can be said against the leading character of the story: the relentless lover of knowledge who lives for that love alone is at least *un succès manqué*. Now and then he becomes a really living, interesting, and rather memorable figure. The cynomaniacs with whom the death or the suffering

of 'that beast man' is of less account than the death or the suffering of a rabbit or a dog must naturally, one would think, have disapproved of a story in which the awkward champion of their preposterous cause has contrived somehow so to concentrate the serious interest of his book on the person of a vivisector, whom he meant to be an object of mere abhorrence, as to leave him an object of something like sympathy and admiration as well as compassion and respect ; none the less deserved if he did once feel a desire to vivisect his vicious and thankless idiot of a brother. The cynical sentimentality—cynical in the metaphorical no less than in the literal sense of the word—which winces and whines at the thought of a benefit conferred on mankind at the price of experiments made on the vile or at any rate the viler body of a beast is worth exactly as much as the humanity and sympathy which inspire the advocates of free trade in the most unspeakable kind of pestilence. And it strikes me that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite (of *The Moonstone*) would have been a fitter champion of free and independent hydrophobia than the creator of that distinguished philanthropist ; who would certainly have been a quite ideal chairman at a meeting of the Ladies' Society for the Propagation of the—well, let us say for the Dissemination of Contagious Disease (Unlimited).

What brought Sir Visto's ill-got wealth to waste ?  
Some demon whispered—' Visto ! have a taste.'

A slight change in that famous couplet will express and condense the truth about Wilkie Collins the teacher and preacher more happily and aptly than many pages of analysis.

What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?  
Some demon whispered—'Wilkie! have a mission.'

Nothing can be more fatuous than to brand all didactic or missionary fiction as an illegitimate or inferior form of art: the highest works in that line fall short only of the highest ever achieved by man. Many of the very truest and noblest triumphs achieved by the matchless genius of Charles Dickens were achieved in this field: but Collins, I must really be allowed to repeat, was no more a Dickens than Dickens was a Shakespeare; and if the example of his illustrious friend misled him into emulation or imitation of such labours, we can only regret that he was thus misguided; remembering nevertheless that 'the light which led astray was light from' Dickens.

In some but by no means in all of his later novels there is much of the peculiar and studious ability which distinguishes his best: but his originally remarkable faculty for writing short stories had undergone a total and unaccountable decay. *After Dark* is one of the most delightful books he has left us: each of the stories in it is a little model, a little masterpiece in its kind: but if we compare the admirable story of *The Yellow Mask* with the hideous fiction of *The Haunted Hotel*, we cannot but acknowledge and deplore in the latter novelle such an absolute eclipse or collapse of all the qualities which we admired in the earlier that it reads rather like a bad parody than like a bad imitation of its author's better work.

It would seem something less than complimentary to say of an industrious and not unambitious writer that the



crowning merit, the most distinctive quality, of his very best work was to be sought and would be found in the construction of an interesting and perplexing story, well conceived, well contrived, and well moulded into lifelike and attractive shape; yet this is what we enjoy—it is all, or almost all, that we find to enjoy, to admire, or to approve—in a work of tragic art so admirable to so many generations as was *The Orphan*; it is the supreme quality of a work so far superior to Otway's as *The Maid's Tragedy*. And both these famous poems are faultier in study of character—more false, incoherent, and incredible—than almost any work by Wilkie Collins. It is but right and reasonable that his abilities should find such favour as they find in France; that so fair an example of his conscientious and ingenious workmanship as the story called *I Say No* should have been honoured by the appearance of a masterly translation in the columns of the *Rappel*. His mannerisms and faults of style are much less obvious and obtrusive in a foreign version: his best qualities are commoner, I regret to think, in French than in English fiction. Such lucidity, such order, such care in the adjustment of parts and the arrangement of the whole, would hardly seem so exceptional to a French reader as to claim for the possessor of these merits a place in the Pantheon; nor can it be supposed that a memorial in Westminster Abbey would not be considered by most Englishmen something more than an adequate recognition of his claims. But a friendly and kindly recollection of them is no more than may be hoped for and expected from a later generation than his own.

into this world—that those who accepted him were bound to reject all others as nullities—they had at least the merit of irrefragable logic ; they could claim at least the credit of indisputable consistency. But when other gods or godlings are accepted as participants in the divine nature ; when his temple is transformed into a pantheon, and a place assigned his godhead a little beneath Shakespeare, a little above Dante, or cheek by jowl with Homer ; when Isaiah and Æschylus, for anything we know, may be admitted to a greater or lesser share in his incommunicable and indivisible supremacy—then, indeed, it is high time to enter a strenuous and (if it be possible) a serious protest. The first apostles alone were the depositaries of the pure and perfect evangel : these later and comparatively heterodox disciples have adulterated and debased the genuine metal of absolute, coherent, unalloyed and unqualified nonsense.

To the better qualities discernible in the voluminous and incoherent effusions of Walt Whitman it should not be difficult for any reader not unduly exasperated by the rabid idiocy of the Whitmaniacs to do full and ample justice : for these qualities are no less simple and obvious than laudable and valuable. A just enthusiasm, a genuine passion of patriotic and imaginative sympathy, a sincere though limited and distorted love of nature, an eager and earnest faith in freedom and in loyalty—in the loyalty that can only be born of liberty ; a really manful and a nobly rational tone of mind with regard to the crowning questions of duty and of death ; these excellent qualities of emotion and reflection find here and there a not inadequate expression in a style of rhetoric not always flatulent or inharmonious. Origin-

ality of matter or of manner, of structure or of thought, it would be equally difficult for any reader not endowed with a quite exceptional gift of ignorance or of hebetude to discover in any part of Mr. Whitman's political or ethical or physical or proverbial philosophy. But he has said wise and noble things upon such simple and eternal subjects as life and death, pity and enmity, friendship and fighting; and even the intensely conventional nature of its elaborate and artificial simplicity should not be allowed, by a magnanimous and candid reader, too absolutely to eclipse the genuine energy and the occasional beauty of his feverish and convulsive style of writing.

All this may be cordially conceded by the lovers of good work in any kind, however imperfect, incomposite, and infirm; and more than this the present writer at any rate most decidedly never intended to convey by any tribute of sympathy or admiration which may have earned for him the wholly unmerited honour of an imaginary enlistment in the noble army of Whitmaniacs. He has therefore no palinode to chant, no recantation to intone; for if it seems and is unreasonable to attribute a capacity of thought to one who has never given any sign of thinking, a faculty of song to one who has never shown ability to sing, it must be remembered, on the other hand, that such qualities of energetic emotion and sonorous expression as distinguish the happier moments and the more sincere inspirations of such writers as Whitman or as Byron have always, in common parlance, been allowed to pass muster and do duty for the faculty of thinking or the capacity of singing. Such an use of common terms is doubtless inaccurate and inexact, if

judged by the 'just but severe law' of logical definition or of mathematical precision : but such abuse or misuse of plain words is generally understood as conveying no more than a conventional import such as may be expressed by the terms with which we subscribe an ordinary letter, or by the formula through which we decline an untimely visit. Assuredly I never have meant to imply what most assuredly I never have said—that I regarded Mr. Whitman as a poet or a thinker in the proper sense ; the sense in which the one term is applicable to Coleridge or to Shelley, the other to Bacon or to Mill. Whoever may have abdicated his natural right, as a being not born without a sense of music or a sense of reason, to protest against the judgment which discerns in *Childe Harold* or in *Drum-Taps* a masterpiece of imagination and expression, of intelligence or of song, I never have abdicated mine. The highest literary quality discoverable in either book is rhetoric : and very excellent rhetoric in either case it sometimes is ; what it is at other times I see no present necessity to say. But Whitmaniacs and Byronites have yet to learn that if rhetoric were poetry John Bright would be a poet at least equal to John Milton, Demosthenes to Sophocles, and Cicero to Catullus. Poetry may be something more—I certainly am not concerned to deny it—than an art or a science ; but not because it is not, strictly speaking, a science or an art. There is a science of verse as surely as there is a science of mathematics : there is an art of expression by metre as certainly as there is an art of representation by painting. To some poets the understanding of this science, the mastery of this art, would seem to come by a natural

instinct which needs nothing but practice for its development, its application, and its perfection: others by patient and conscientious study of their own abilities attain a no less unmistakable and a scarcely less admirable success. But the man of genius and the dullard who cannot write good verse are equally out of the running. 'Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?' inquires Mr. Whitman of some extraordinary if not imaginary interlocutor; and proceeds, with some not ineffective energy of expression, to explain that 'I lull nobody—and you will never understand me.' No, my dear good sir—or camerado, if that be the more courteous and conventional address (a modest reader might deferentially reply): not in the wildest visions of a disordered slumber could I ever have dreamed of doing anything of the kind. Nor do we ask them even from such other and inferior scribes or bards as the humble Homer, the modest Milton, or the obsolete and narrow-minded Shakespeare—poets of sickly feudality, of hide-bound classicism, of effete and barbarous incompetence. But metre, rhythm, cadence not merely appreciable but definable and reducible to rule and measurement, though we do not expect from you, we demand from all who claim, we discern in the works of all who have achieved, any place among poets of any class whatsoever. The question whether your work is in any sense poetry has no more to do with dulcet rhymes than with the differential calculus. The question is whether you have any more right to call yourself a poet, or to be called a poet by any man who knows verse from prose, or black from white, or speech from silence, or his right hand from his left, than to call yourself or to be called, on the strength

of your published writings, a mathematician, a logician, a painter, a political economist, a sculptor, a dynamiter, an old parliamentary hand, a civil engineer, a dealer in marine stores, an amphoter, a triptych, a rhomboid, or a rectangular parallelogram. 'Vois-tu bien, tu es baron comme ma pantoufle!' said old Gillenormand—the creature of one who was indeed a creator or a poet: and the humblest of critics who knows any one thing from any one other thing has a right to say to the man who offers as poetry what the exuberant incontinence of a Whitman presents for our acceptance, 'Tu es poète comme mon—soulie.'

But the student has other and better evidence than any merely negative indication of impotence in the case of the American as in the case of the British despoiler and disclaimer of so pitiful a profession or ambition as that of a versifier. Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Whitman have both been good enough to try their hands at lyric verse: and the ear which has once absorbed their dulcet rhymes will never need to be reminded of the reason for their contemptuous abhorrence of a diversion so contemptible as the art of Coleridge and Shelley.

Out of eternity

This new day is born :

Into eternity

This day shall return.

Such were the flute-notes of Diogenes Devilsdung : comparable by those who would verify the value of his estimate with any stanza of Shelley's *To a Skylark*. And here is a sample of the dulcet rhymes which a most tragic occasion succeeded in evoking from the orotund oratist of Manhattan :—

The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
*While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring ;*

For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores  
 a-crowding : (*sic*)

For you they call, the surging mass, their eager faces  
 turning.

'Iov' Iov', ὦ ὦ κακὰ. Upon the whole, I prefer Burns—  
 or Hogg—to Carlyle, and Dibdin—or Catnach—to  
 Whitman.

A pedantic writer of poems distilled from other poems (which, as the immortal author of the imperishable *Leaves of Grass* is well aware, must 'pass away')—a Wordsworth, for example, or a Tennyson—would hardly have made 'eyes' follow the verb they must be supposed to govern. Nor would a poor creature whose ear was yet unattuned to the cadence of 'chants democratic' have permitted his Pegasus so remarkable a capriole as to result in the rhythmic reverberation of such rhymes as these. When a boy who remains unable after many efforts to cross the Asses' Bridge expresses his opinion that Euclid was a beastly old fool, his obviously impartial verdict is generally received by his elders with exactly the same amount of respectful attention as is accorded by any competent reader to the equally valuable and judicial deliverances of Messrs. Whitman, Emerson, and Carlyle on the subject of poetry—that is, of lyrical or creative literature. The first critic of our time—perhaps the largest-minded and surest-sighted of any age—has pointed out, in an essay on poetry which should not be too long left buried in the columns of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the exhaustive accuracy of

the Greek terms which define every claimant to the laurel as either a singer or a maker. There is no third term, as there is no third class. If then it appears that Mr. Walt Whitman has about as much gift of song as his precursors and apparent models in rhythmic structure and style, Mr. James Macpherson and Mr. Martin Tupper, his capacity for creation is the only thing that remains for us to consider. And on that score we find him, beyond all question, rather like the later than like the earlier of his masters. Macpherson could at least evoke shadows: Mr. Tupper and Mr. Whitman can only accumulate words. As to his originality in the matter of free speaking, it need only be observed that no remarkable mental gift is requisite to qualify man or woman for membership of a sect mentioned by Dr. Johnson—the Adamites, who believed in the virtue of public nudity. If those worthies claimed the right to bid their children run about the streets stark naked, the magistrate, observed Johnson, ‘would have a right to flog them into their doublets;’ a right no plainer than the right of common sense and sound criticism to flog the Whitmaniacs into their strait-waistcoats; or, were there any female members of such a sect, into their strait-petticoats. If nothing that concerns the physical organism of men or of women is common or unclean or improper for literary manipulation, it may be maintained, by others than the disciples of a contemporary French novelist who has amply proved the sincerity of his own opinion to that effect, that it is not beyond the province of literature to describe with realistic exuberance of detail the functions of digestion or indigestion in all its processes—the



objects and the results of an aperient or an emetic medicine. Into 'the troughs of Zolaism,' as Lord Tennyson calls them (a phrase which bears rather unduly hard 'on the quadrupedal pig'), I am happy to believe that Mr. Whitman has never dipped a passing nose: he is a writer of something occasionally like English, and a man of something occasionally like genius. But in his treatment of topics usually regarded as no less unfit for public exposition and literary illustration than those which have obtained notoriety for the would-be bastard of Balzac—the Davenant of the (French) prose Shakespeare, he has contrived to make 'the way of a man with a maid' (Proverbs xxx. 19) almost as loathsome-ludicrous and almost as ludicrously loathsome—I speak merely of the æsthetic or literary aspect of his effusions—as the Swiftian or Zolaesque enthusiasm of bestiality which insists on handling what 'goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught' (St. Matthew xv. 17). The Zolas and the Whitmen, to whom nothing, absolutely and literally nothing, is unclean or common, have an obvious and incalculable advantage over the unconverted who have never enjoyed the privilege of a vision like St. Peter's, and received the benefit of a supernatural prohibition to call anything common or unclean. They cannot possibly be exposed, and they cannot possibly be put to shame: for that best of all imaginable reasons which makes it proverbially difficult to 'take the breeks off a Highlander.'

It would really seem as though, in literary and other matters, the very plainness and certitude of a principle made it doubly necessary for those who maintain it to enforce and reinforce it over and over again; as though,

the more obvious it were, the more it needed indication and demonstration, assertion and reassertion. There is no more important, no more radical and fundamental truth of criticism than this: that, in poetry perhaps above all other arts, the method or treatment, the manner of touch, the tone of expression, is the first and last thing to be considered. There is no subject which may not be treated with success (I do not say there are no subjects which on other than artistic grounds it may not be as well to avoid, it may not be better to pass by) if the poet, by instinct or by training, knows exactly how to handle it aright, to present it without danger of just or rational offence. For evidence of this truth we need look no further than the pastorals of Virgil and Theocritus. But under the dirty clumsy paws of a harper whose plectrum is a muck-rake any tune will become a chaos of discords, though the motive of the tune should be the first principle of nature—the passion of man for woman or the passion of woman for man. And the unhealthily demonstrative and obtrusive animalism of the Whitmaniad is as unnatural, as incompatible with the wholesome instincts of human passion, as even the filthy and inhuman asceticism of SS. Macarius and Simeon Stylites. If anything can justify the serious and deliberate display of merely physical emotion in literature or in art, it must be one of two things: intense depth of feeling expressed with inspired perfection of simplicity, with divine sublimity of fascination, as by Sappho; or transcendent supremacy of actual and irresistible beauty in such revelation of naked nature as was possible to Titian. But Mr. Whitman's Eve is a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush

more sense and a good deal more cultivation he might not have made a noticeable orator. As a poet, no amount of improvement that self-knowledge and self-culture might have brought to bear upon such exceptionally raw material could ever have raised him higher than a station to which his homely and manly patriotism would be the best claim that could be preferred for him ; a seat beside such writers as Ebenezer Elliot—or possibly a little higher, on such an elevation as might be occupied by a poet whom careful training had reared and matured into a rather inferior kind of Southey. But to fit himself for such promotion he would have in the first place to resign all claim to the laurels of Gotham, with which the critical sages of that famous borough have bedecked his unbashful brows ; he would have to recognize that he is no more, in the proper sense of the word, a poet, than Communalists or Dissolutionists are, in any sense of the word, Republicans ; that he has exactly as much claim to a place beside Dante as any Vermersch or Vermorel or other verminous and murderous muckworm of the Parisian Commune to a place beside Mazzini ; in other words, that the informing principle of his work is not so much the negation as the contradiction of the creative principle of poetry. And this it is not to be expected that such a man should bring himself to believe, as long as he hears himself proclaimed the inheritor of a seat assigned a hundred years ago by the fantastic adulation of more or less distinguished literary eccentrics to a person of the name of Jephson—whose triumphs as a tragic poet made his admirers tremble for Shakespeare.

## TENNYSON OR DARWIN?

THE quarter from whence the following lucubration is addressed cannot fail to give it weight with the judicious reader whose interest has been aroused by the arguments in support of Lord Verulam's pretensions to the authorship of *Hamlet*. I regret that I can offer no further evidence of the writer's credentials to consideration than such as may be supplied by her own ingenious and intelligent process of ratiocinative inference; but in literary culture and in logical precision it will be apparent that her contribution to the controversial literature of the day is worthy of the comparison which she is not afraid to challenge—is worthy to be set beside the most learned and the most luminous exposition of the so-called Baconian theory.

\*Harwell: Nov. 29, 1857.

"The revelations respecting Shakespeare which were made in the columns of *The Daily Telegraph* have attracted great attention and caused no little sensation here." With these impressive and memorable words the Paris correspondent of the journal above named opens the way for a fresh flood of correspondence on a subject in which no Englishman or Englishwoman now resident in any asylum—so-called—for so-called lunatics or idiots can fail to take a keen and sympathetic interest.

The lamented Delia Bacon, however, to whom we are indebted for the apocalyptic rectification of our errors with regard to the authorship of *Hamlet* and *Othello*, might have rejoiced to know—before she went to heaven in a strait-waistcoat—that her mantle had fallen or was to fall on the shoulders of a younger prophetess. If the authority of Celia Hobbes—whose hand traces these lines, and whose brain has excogitated the theory now in process of exposition—should be considered insufficient, *The Daily Telegraph*, at all events, will scarcely refuse the tribute of attentive consideration to the verdict of Professor Polycarp Conolly, of Bethlemopolis, U. I. S. (United Irish States), South Polynesia. The leisure of over twenty years passed in a padded cell and in investigation of intellectual problems has sufficed—indeed, it has more than sufficed—to confirm the Professor in his original conviction that “Miss Hobbes” (I am permitted—and privileged—to quote his own striking words) “had made it impossible any longer to boycott the question—and that to assert the contrary of so self-evident a truth was to stand grovelling in the quicksands of a petrified conservatism.”

‘The evidence that the late Mr. Darwin was the real author of the poems attributed to Lord Tennyson needs not the corroboration of any cryptogram: but if it did, Miss Lesbia Hume, of Earlswood, has authorized me to say that she would be prepared to supply any amount of evidence to that effect. The first book which brought Mr. Darwin’s name before the public was his record of a voyage on board the *Beagle*. In a comparatively recent poem, written under the assumed name of Tennyson, he referred to the singular manner in which a

sleeping dog of that species "plies his function of the woodland." In an earlier poem, *The Princess*, the evidence derivable from allusion to proper names—that of the real author and that of the pretender—is no less obvious and no less conclusive than that which depends on the words "hang hog," "bacon," "shake," and "spear." The Princess asks if the Prince has nothing to occupy his time—"quoit, *tennis*, ball—no games?" The Prince hears a voice crying to him—"Follow, follow, thou shalt *win*." Here we find half the name of Darwin—the latter half—and two-thirds of the name of Tennyson—the first and the second third—at once associated, contrasted, and harmonized for those who can read the simplest of cryptograms.

'The well-known fact that Bacon's Essays were written by Lord Coke, the *Novum Organon* by Robert Greene, and the *New Atalantis* by Tom Nash (assisted by his friend Gabriel Harvey), might surely have given pause to the Baconite assailants of Shakespeare. On the other hand, we have to consider the no less well-known fact that the poems issued under the name of William Wordsworth were actually written by the Duke of Wellington, who was naturally anxious to conceal the authorship and to parade the sentiments of a poem in which, with characteristic self-complacency and self-conceit, he had attempted to depict himself under the highly idealized likeness of the Happy Warrior. Nor can we reasonably pretend to overlook or to ignore the mass of evidence that the works hitherto attributed to Sir Walter Scott must really be assigned to a more eminent bearer of the same surname—to Lord Chancellor Eldon: whose brother, Lord Stowell, chose in like

manner (and for obvious reasons) to disguise his authorship of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by hiring a notoriously needy and disreputable young peer to father those productions of his erratic genius. The parallel case now before us'—[But here, we regret to say, the language of Miss Hobbes becomes—to put it mildly—contumelious. We are compelled to pass over a paragraph in which the name of Tennyson is handled after the same fashion as is the name of Shakespeare by her transatlantic precursors or associates in the art or the task of a literary detective.]

'Not all the caution displayed by Mr. Darwin in the practice of a studious self-effacement could suffice to prevent what an Irish lady correspondent of my own, Miss Cynthia Berkeley, now of Colney Hatch, has very aptly described as "the occasional slipping off of the motley mask from hoof and tail." When we read of "scirrhous roots and tendons," of "foul-fleshed agaric in the holt," of "the fruit of the Spindle-tree (*Euonymus Europæus*)," of "sparkles in the stone Avanturine,"

Of shale and hornblende, rag and trap and tuff,  
Amygdaloid and trachyte,

we feel, in the expressive words of the same lady, that "the borrowed plumes of peacock poetry have fallen from the inner kernel of the scientific lecturer's pulpit." But if any more special evidence of Darwin's authorship should be required, it will be found in the various references to a creature of whose works and ways the great naturalist has given so copious and so curious an account. "Crown thyself, worm"—could that apostrophe have issued from any other lips than those which expounded to us the place and the importance of worms in the

scheme of nature? Or can it be necessary to cite in further proof of this the well-known passage in *Maud* beginning with what we may call the pre-Darwinian line—"A monstrous eft was of old the lord and master of earth"?

'But the final evidence is to be sought in a poem published long before its author became famous, under his own name, as the exponent of natural selection, of the survival of the fittest, and of the origin of species. The celebrated lines which describe Nature as "so careful of the type, so careless of the single life," and those which follow and reject that theory, are equally conclusive as to the authorship of these and all other verses in which the same hand has recorded the result of the same experience—"that of fifty seeds she often brings but one to bear."

'But—as the Earl of Essex observed in his political comedy, *Love's Labour's Lost*—"satis quod sufficit." The question whether Shakespeare or Bacon was the author of *Hamlet* is now, I trust, not more decisively settled than the question whether *Maud* was written by its nominal author or by the author of *The Origin of Species*.'

. . . . .

Feeling deeply the truth of these last words, I have accepted the office of laying before the reader the theory maintained by the unfortunate lady who has entrusted me with the charge of her manuscript.



*LES CENCI.*

1883.

AU premier quart de ce siècle, l'Angleterre est redevenue ce qu'elle était du temps de Shakespeare, ce qu'est la France du temps de Victor Hugo—un véritable nid de poètes. Jamais, depuis les jours d'Eschyle et de Pindare, la poésie lyrique ne s'était élevée à de pareilles hauteurs. Deux hommes mûrs, Coleridge et Wordsworth, deux jeunes hommes, Shelley et Keats, dépassaient tellement tous les autres que nous ne considérons plus qu'en souriant les prétentions de leurs émules à leur disputer la place. Et cependant il y avait parmi ces autres des hommes tels que Walter Scott, Landor et Byron. Tous ces poètes se sont essayés au drame ; un seul y a réussi : c'est celui qu'on aurait cru le moins propre à ce travail sublime et sombre. C'est l'idéologue par excellence, l'habitant des nuages, le fou criminel qui avait eu ce double avantage de naître aristocrate et d'être élevé par des prêtres, et qui en avait profité pour se déclarer à vingt ans libre-penseur et républicain. Cet être absurde, dénoncé et bafoué par tous les journaux honnêtes et par tous les hommes sérieux—cet animal qui croyait à la république tombée, à l'idéal écrasé—cet Anglais qui se permettait de trouver que Waterloo n'était peut-être pas le dernier mot de l'histoire—ce rêveur encore plus ridicule que scélérat s'est trouvé

capable de résister à ce que tout le monde venait d'échouer. Il ne lui suffisait plus de partager avec Coleridge la suprématie lyrique : il s'est proposé de le dépasser sur le terrain du théâtre. Ce grand poète venait de faire représenter, non sans succès, une tragédie morale et religieuse où toutes les qualités dramatiques brillaient par leur abondance, mais où la faiblesse de la trame et la nullité des personnages faisaient ressortir l'éclat magique de quelques personnages incomparables qui eussent fait honneur à Milton et que n'aurait pas déavoués Shakespeare. Évidemment, si quelqu'un devait faire mieux, ce ne pouvait être cet utopiste égaré qui faisait hauser les épaules à tout le monde quand il ne faisait pas frémir d'horreur et reculer de dégoût tous les honnêtes gens du pays qui l'avaient rejeté de son sein, tout en lui arrachant, de par la loi et au nom de la morale publique, la tutelle de ses deux enfants. Il venait encore de publier tout récemment un drame lyrique où se trouvaient entassées les unes sur les autres toutes les folies les plus extravagantes, toutes les chimères les plus immorales. Ce poème absurde et monstrueux, le *Prométhée délivré*, annonçait la fin de tous les dogmes, prédisait l'écroulement de tous les trônes, saluait l'éclosion de toutes les libertés, proclamait la disparition de tous les esclavages, réclamait l'apaisement de toutes les haines. Il va sans dire que la critique avait fait justice de ces turpitudes et de ces horreurs. Un cri de rage entrecoupé d'un éclat de rire venait de saluer l'apparition d'une pareille monstruosité. Pas de grâce pour les grands morceaux lyriques : au premier acte, c'était une malédiction jetée au Tout-Puissant acclamé des prêtres bourreaux, qui ne s'adressait évidemment pas au seul Jupiter antique : à

la fin, c'était l'épithalame du ciel sans dieux et de la terre sans rois, c'était l'affirmation de cette idée diabolique qu'il n'existe rien de plus haut que le devoir, rien de plus saint que le dévouement, rien d'aussi juste que la miséricorde, rien d'aussi puissant que le droit qui souffre et qui pardonne.

Cette œuvre inqualifiable à peine terminée, le songe-cieux qui venait de proférer toutes ces choses abominables se mit à écrire une tragédie ; non pas, comme son ami Byron, une tragédie à la mode de Voltaire, une contrefaçon d'Alfieri qui pût lui mériter le titre glorieux du Campistron anglais : un drame à la façon de ce barbare de Shakespeare dont l'auteur des *Deux Foscari* ne pouvait parler que l'écume à la bouche, en lui jetant des impertinences de collégien idiot. Et depuis Webster, le confrère et l'héritier de Shakespeare, jamais des vers pareils n'avaient retenti sur la scène anglaise. Ce n'est pas—il s'en faut bien—que le théâtre ait accueilli le drame que lui présentait Shelley. Une telle idée n'aurait pu germer que dans la cervelle détraquée de ce poète monomane. Les directeurs se signèrent d'horreur à cette proposition d'aliéné. Mettre sous les yeux d'une jeune femme tant soit peu respectable ce rôle effrayant de Béatrice Cenci ! Shelley dut se contenter de faire imprimer son chef-d'œuvre à Livourne.

Cependant il était impossible, même en 1819, qu'une pareille œuvre passât absolument inaperçue. Un journaliste pieux, mais anonyme—'que j'en ai vu, de ces saints-là !'—fit savoir à ses abonnés qu'en lisant cette chose exécrable il avait cru voir s'ouvrir l'enfer, entendre les accents d'un damné. Rien de plus logique. Cette poésie infernale prêchait en effet la révolte contre la

Pour chacun des rares amis qui lui restent elle a quelque parole adorable de fière consolation. Shakespeare n'a rien écrit de plus doux ni de plus poignant que ses adieux au jeune frère qui seul ne va pas partager le sort de sa famille assassinée de par la loi cléricale. Tout, dans ce rôle merveilleux,—jusqu'à la chanson exquise et funèbre dont elle berce au cachot sa mère épuisée de souffrance—tout porte l'empreinte d'une douceur héroïque qui fait songer à Homère et à Shakespeare. Cette parole vibrante et sonore qui vient de flétrir la lâcheté de ses complices dont la fermeté chancelle et fléchit sous la douleur, et qui redevient, pour les consoler, tendre et fraîche comme un chant d'oiseau, ne cessera jamais de retentir au plus profond de nos cœurs. Devant cette figure suave et sublime, toute critique ennemie a depuis longtemps dû s'incliner et se taire.

Mais Cenci ?

C'est ici que la critique se rattrape. Selon elle, cette figure épouvantable n'est qu'un masque vide et creux, qu'un porte-voix que le caprice impie et furibond d'un rêveur malsain vient emplir de blasphèmes sonores. On a beau lui rappeler que cet homme a vécu ; que le Saint-Siège l'a protégé, choyé, vengé ; que le vicaire du Dieu catholique lui a vendu en effet le droit de faire ce qui lui plairait, et qu'il en a profité pour outrager la nature de toutes les façons imaginables ; que le poète qui l'a mis en scène n'a pas voulu dévoiler—disons mieux, que ce poète n'a pas osé même indiquer—la centième partie de ses forfaits avérés ; pour les raisonneurs moralistes du nord, le comte Francesco Cenci, tel que l'a peint Shelley, reste toujours impossible. C'est le tyran idéal, soit ; ce n'est point un être actuel, un homme de chair et de sang.

En effet, il y a peut-être dans ces réclamations un petit point de vérité. On ne se figure pas aisément un monstre aussi poète que ce vicillard effroyable. Dans cette bouche écumante de rage luxurieuse, Shelley a mis des accents, des imprécations, des élans dignes de Job ou de Prométhée. Le réalisme ne ferait que gagner à la suppression de ces magnificences incroyables. Mais, franchement, se figure-t-on ce que ce serait qu'un Cenci mis en scène tout nu, selon le programme réaliste ? Otez-lui cette pourpre étincelante, ce manteau de prophète maniaque—arrachez-lui cette couronne de poésie sombre et radieuse—la chose qui restera ferait reculer, je ne dis pas les poètes, mais les agents de police correctionnelle. D'ailleurs, est-il donc impossible qu'un monstre ait des éclairs de génie ? César Borgia et Bonaparte I<sup>er</sup>, incestueux en famille et meurtriers en politique, n'en manquaient précisément pas. Pierre le Grand, qui viola sa nièce presque aux yeux de son mari complaisant, en avait de quoi suffire à toute une dynastie impériale. Francesco Cenci, empereur et roi lui aussi à sa façon, peut bien en avoir assez pour le rendre supportable au spectateur qui doit contempler en idée ce colosse éblouissant du crime.

Voici un homme qui commande aux autres hommes par le moyen de leur lâcheté et à Dieu par le moyen de son intérêt. Il a Dieu dans sa poche et l'humanité sous son talon. Il domine tout son monde, ayant pour lui l'or et la religion. Il est franchement dévot ; il serait bien bête de se refuser des jouissances qui conduiraient naturellement tout droit en enfer un athée ou même un catholique pauvre. Est-ce sa faute à lui si ses sens émoussés ne prennent plus plaisir aux voluptés mielleuses

dont s'abreuvait sa jeunesse ? Vraiment, il faut être d'une impudence bien endurcie pour venir reprocher à un homme ses goûts particuliers. Est-il donc possible que lui, par exemple, il se contente des douceurs fades de l'amour sensuel ? Est-ce qu'on peut passer sa vie à manger du miel, à sucer des fleurs comme une abeille ? Et cependant, avant de tuer un ennemi et d'entendre ses gémissements et les gémissements de ses enfants, il ne concevait pas qu'on pût trouver d'autres jouissances sur cette terre. Maintenant ce n'est plus le sang versé, le supplice rapide, la torture passagère et toute charnelle, qui puisse rassasier son appétit énorme. C'est au cœur qu'il s'en prend, c'est l'âme qu'il veut mettre au chevalet, c'est l'esprit humain, c'est la conscience intime qu'il veut faire saigner sous les coups de fouet réitérés de sa tyrannie infatigable, de sa luxure inépuisable et sanglante.

Il est certain que ce jeune freluquet de Néron n'est plus qu'un pauvre petit tyran assez inoffensif à côté de ce vieillard orthodoxe et satisfait. Car, à tout prendre, c'est un homme heureux, content de soi-même et des autres, que le digne et vénérable seigneur qui vient de faire à son ami intime cet exposé de son for intérieur. Néron avait peut-être des accès de tristesse, des moments sombres où le doute, sinon même la peur, se mêlait à son invincible ennui ; il n'est pas avéré que Néron n'ait jamais senti la piqure du remords ; ce malheureux païen ne voyait naturellement devant lui que le Tartare ou bien le néant ; sa figure bouffie, aux traits alourdis, est toute chargée d'une mélancolie féroce. Néron ne pouvait être sûr de n'avoir pas contre lui les maîtres suprêmes ; il n'avait pas, lui, cette ressource

admirable et toute catholique de graisser la patte à Dieu.

Cenci, plus éclairé, ne voit devant lui qu'un juge qui tend la main en souriant, qui lui achète un terrain au prix d'un pardon, qui lui cède pour un peu d'or le droit d'un assassinat ou d'un inceste ; il serait donc bien bon de se gêner. Pour un esprit imbu de cette foi rassurante et consolatrice, est-ce qu'il y a des droits ou des devoirs, des raisons de s'abstenir ou de se repentir ? Voici donc un homme né dur et sensuel, féroce et lascif ; la société l'a formé, la religion l'a perfectionné : c'est un être complet, monstrueux comme un dieu ; c'est un tout-puissant rassasié de tout, auquel il ne reste rien d'inépuisé hors un seul appétit, que rien n'assouvirait jamais : la haine ; le désir immense de faire le mal ; la volupté profonde de corrompre en faisant souffrir, de faire souffrir en corrompant. Cet homme se connaît à fond ; il aime à se contempler ; il jette à la tête de ses convives tout ce qu'il a dans l'âme de fureur et de convoitise et de joie, comme il leur jetterait à la figure la lie d'une coupe vidée, sachant bien que pas un n'osera lui recracher ses affronts. Un seul être va se lever en face de cette toute-puissance ricuse et meurtrière : sa propre fille le dénonce et lui impose pour un instant silence ; il s'en venge par le plus inexprimable de tous les forfaits, le seul qui lui restât à commettre. Shelley, dans son admirable préface, a déclaré, avec une éloquence digne de Victor Hugo, que la victime de cet attentat ' eût été plus sage et meilleure ' en s'abstenant de toute espèce de représailles, en se contentant de souffrir et de pardonner ; il a proclamé l'inviolabilité de la vie humaine incarnée dans Francesco Cenci, comme le plus grand poète de la génération sui-

vante devait proclamer l'inviolabilité de la vie humaine incarnée dans Louis Bonaparte. Pour moi, je dois l'avouer, il me serait aussi facile de croire à l'infailibilité de Clément VIII et de Pie IX qu'à cette inviolabilité-là. Il y aura toujours, comme il y a toujours eu, des êtres humains envers lesquels l'humanité n'a qu'un seul devoir : les supprimer, les exterminer, les anéantir ; sinon de par la loi, de par l'arrêt de la conscience universelle. Ayant en elle cette foi profonde, Béatrice rend à l'enfer ce qui est à l'enfer—l'âme du comte Francesco Cenci.

Il était bien temps. Le dernier monologue du vieillard, où il invoque la conscience pour la fouler aux pieds en raillant, l'enfer pour s'associer à la joie énorme qui va faire trembler ses voûtes au son du rire immense et triomphal des démons, c'est le défi suprême qui provoque d'en bas le tonnerre oublieux.

Trente ans après la publication des *Cenci*, un poète illustre, né dix-sept ans avant Shelley, a voulu remanier ce sujet d'une façon plus actuelle et moins idéaliste. Républicain et libre-penseur lui aussi, Walter Savage Landor avait à son insu inspiré et raffermi par ses premières poésies l'âme et le génie du collégien qui devait écrire le *Prométhée délivré*. (Plus d'un demi-siècle après, un autre jeune homme qui aspirait à se montrer poète est allé remercier le même grand écrivain, alors âgé de quatre-vingt-neuf ans, d'avoir fait pour lui la même chose.) Homme intrépide entre tous, ayant tous les genres de courage, Landor, qui ne reculait pas facilement, dut pourtant reculer devant la tâche de mettre à nu le crime suprême du père de Béatrice Cenci. 'Un autre,' a-t-il dit, 'osa passer par là ; moi, je ne l'ai pas osé.' En lisant ses cinq scènes magnifiques,



on sent que les choses ont dû probablement s'arranger de cette façon plutôt que de la façon indiquée par Shelley. Cenci, en homme avisé, commence par consulter son directeur au sujet du forfait qu'il prémédite. Il n'a pas besoin de mettre les points sur les i ; ces deux saints hommes se comprennent à demi-mot. Le directeur doit avouer que la pensée même d'une pareille chose 'le confond et le stupéfie.' Cela ne peut que coûter cher, très cher même. Cependant,—enfin,—'s'il vous faut absolument la pêche,—eh bien ! cueillez la pêche ; mais, franchement, vous feriez mieux d'y renoncer.' Et ce Tartuffe tragique s'en va. Cenci, resté seul, repasse dans son esprit les arguments infaillibles qui viennent de lui démontrer ce fait salulaire, qu'un crime absous de par Sa Sainteté ne saurait en aucune façon endommager son âme à lui Cenci ; que, cette absolution une fois achetée, le reste ne saurait regarder que celui qui s'en sera rendu garant. Cela posé, cet affamé sinistre s'en va tout naturellement 'cueillir la pêche' en pleine sécurité de conscience. Voilà sans doute un être plus humain et plus vraisemblable que le forcené titanique dont on entend gronder et tonner la parole foudroyante dans le vers éclatant et sonore de Shelley. Mais, je le répète, ce Cenci-là, logiquement développé par l'évolution d'un drame complet qui se déroulerait sous l'influence de sa volonté, serait insupportable, même aux 'naturalistes' les plus engoués d'abomination et de laideur. Aussi Landor n'a-t-il voulu le ramener en scène qu'une fois de plus, et cela avant l'accomplissement du forfait qui doit écraser l'existence de sa fille jusqu'alors insouciant et heureuse. Le martyre de la pauvre enfant assassinée lentement par les bourreaux

ecclésiastiques est plus poignant chez Landor que chez Shelley. Mais ce sera toujours à ce dernier—ce sera toujours au plus grand poète lyrique de l'Angleterre—que l'on songera en entendant prononcer ce nom d'une fascination si lugubre et si douce—le nom de Béatrice Cenci.

Il va sans dire qu'on a fait de la renommée inattaquable de Shelley comme poète lyrique une arme pour l'attaquer du côté dramatique. Cette espèce de critique n'a jamais valu et ne vaudra jamais la peine qu'on lui donne en passant le coup de pied qu'elle sollicite. *Sic fuit, est, et erit.* Mais il est néanmoins digne de remarque que le chef-d'œuvre avoué, le chef-d'œuvre incomparable du drame anglais au dix-neuvième siècle ait été l'œuvre d'un poète lyrique que le seul Coleridge, entre tous ses compatriotes les plus illustres, a pu deux ou trois fois égaler ou dépasser. Shelley, le moins égoïste des hommes, a eu beau s'incliner un instant devant les prétentions bruyantes et populaires de Byron, le temps a définitivement remis à leurs places l'homme généreux et l'homme envieux. Otez à Byron son enjouement cynique et son éloquence sentimentale, mélange inégal de Louvet et de Rousseau,—ôtez-lui sa puissance d'imagination satirique, ses nobles élans révolutionnaires et ses grandes qualités de combattant,—il ne restera de ce géant manqué qu'un poète de troisième ordre, le moins viril et le plus égoïste des hommes de lettres. Otez à Shelley sa foi sublime, son dévouement héroïque, son amour du droit et de l'idéal, il sera toujours un des plus grands poètes de tous les siècles.

Il est juste que ce soit la noble main d'une femme poète et républicaine qui ait entrepris si vaillamment et

si bien mené à bout cette tâche glorieuse et fraternelle de faire connaître à la patrie de Victor Hugo le génie de Percy Bysshe Shelley. Je voudrais être plus digne de la féliciter et de la remercier d'un bienfait qui devrait faire de deux grands peuples ses débiteurs émus et reconnaissants.

THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS  
OF  
VICTOR HUGO

## I.

## 'THÉÂTRE EN LIBERTÉ.'

1886.

IT is exactly two hundred and eighty-six years since the first edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* came from the press, two hundred and sixty-three since the publication of *The Tempest*. And nothing till now has appeared comparable in kind and in degree with those two masterpieces of faultless fancy and boundless imagination. The earlier in date was published sixteen years before the death of Shakespeare; the second, seven years after. The first posthumous gift of the only poet who can reasonably be regarded as the successor of Shakespeare is the first volume of dramatic verse which can be set beside them.

Between the earliest and the latest of the seven dramatic pieces comprised in this priceless volume there is a space of exactly twenty years. In the third May which had risen upon the poet in a strange land there came from the hand of an exile the most brilliant and joyous effusion of laughing fancy that ever broke into birdlike music of rippling and shining verse. Flowers, birds, and butterflies undertake the conversion of an unsexed pedant or philosopher to a sense of his natural humanity; but the conquest is reserved for the first girl who flashes across his way. The words are actually fragrant and radiant with the very perfume and the

very splendour of a woodland wilderness in spring ; we smell the dripping flowers, hear the clamouring birds, catch the gleam of falling raindrops. With Shakespearean condescension and with Shakespearean audacity the poet has dared or deigned to introduce parodies and puns into the concert of wildwood harmonies and contemplative delights ; and the poetry is all the finer for the fun which brightens and relieves it. The next in date, a poem as bright and sweet, but graver and deeper in tone, was written eleven years later. In the mean time Victor Hugo had given us *Les Contemplations*, the first series of *La Légende des Siècles*, *Les Misérables*, and the essay on Shakespeare ; *La Grand'mère* was written in the year that gave us *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*. It is much to say that nothing ever written by its author is touched with more exquisite tenderness and enlivened with more admirable humour than this little play ; but nothing less can be said of it by any competent reader. The action is equally simple and perfect ; the characters are finished and quickened in a few strokes, swift and sure as the glance of sunbeams. An old margravine, the reigning princess of some province-(as we may suppose) not far from the sea-coast of Bohemia, is more troubled than ever was King Polixenes by the delinquencies of a son who has fled from ducal state to marry a low-born maiden, and lives hidden with his wife and children in a woodland solitude. Hither, after ten years of separation, the imperious old lady makes her way under the escort of a zealous old chamberlain allied by collateral descent to the families of Polonius and Malvolio. As a princess in her own right she has

the power to annul the marriage, to clap her son into prison, and to shut up his wife in a convent. She is something of a philosopher, too, as befits a contemporary of the great Frederic and the great Voltaire, but one who thoroughly appreciates the value of the sound doctrine that many views and opinions are good to hold and bad to act on. She withdraws out of sight and hearing of an interview between the wedded lovers which is one of the most perfect scenes in all the range of poetry for tenderness of passion and purity of ardour, but returns in time to witness the play and overhear the prattle of their three little children. It would be superfluous to say that no other poet could have written a line of this scene, or that it is actually as delightful as nature itself—as the very presence and voice of children. Nor is it needful to explain the simple and exquisite catastrophe or conclusion of a poem written in the space of seven summer days. And this is a sample of the style in which it is written:—

Dieu veut que, parfois, l'ombre ait une âme gaie ;  
 Et cette âme, c'est toi. Ma tête fatiguée  
 Se pose sur ton sein, point d'appui du proscrit.  
 L'ombre, te voyant rire, a confiance et rit.  
 Les roses pour s'ouvrir attendent que tu passes.  
 Nous sommes acceptés là-haut par les espaces,  
 Et, tu dis vrai, les champs, les halliers noirs, les monts  
 Sont de notre parti, puisque nous nous aimons.  
 Oui, rien n'est méchant, rien, rien, pas même l'ortie.  
 Que c'est charmant, l'étang, l'aurore, la sortie  
 Des nids au point du jour, chacun risquant son vol,  
 L'herbe en fleur, Dieu partout, la nuit, le rossignol ;  
 Toute cette harmonie est une sombre joute,  
 Exquise en son mystère, et sa beauté s'ajoute

À la forêt, au lac, à l'étoile des cieux.

Le chêne, en te voyant, frémit, ce pauvre vieux ;  
La source offre son eau, la ronce offre ses mûres,  
Et les ruisseaux, les prés, les parfums, les murmures,  
Semblent n'avoir pour but que d'être autour de toi.

And this melody of speaking sunshine, this radiance of visible music, came from the harbour of exile which had sent forth twelve years earlier the terrible and truly invincible armada of the *Châtiments*. Dante writing at Verona the fourth act of the *Winter's Tale* would be, if we could conceive that possible, the only parallel to this.

But the two longest of the dramatic poems in this collection, which are dated respectively two and four years later than this exquisite little comedy, bear upon them, for all their brightness and lightness of general form or occasional expression, the visible image and superscription of exile and suffering, the sign of heroic meditation, the seal of patriotic passion. And yet in scarcely any other work has the poet given such unbridled freedom to the flight at once of ærial fancy, of earth-born humour, and of heaven-born imagination—the three steeds yoked neck by neck to a chariot more triumphal than that of Achilles. In the romantic play which under the unromantic title of *Mangeront-ils ?* conceals and reveals a combination of these concordant powers for which we can find no parallel but in Aristophanes or in Shakespeare, the wild and wayward liberty of action and evolution takes a tone of serious interest, a note of tragic dignity, from the transient passage and the posthumous influence of the centenarian white witch who is to Guanhumara as moonlight to a raging fire. The fierce and foolish king, the sedate and sneering



parasite, ‘un neutre à fond hostile’ like Mérimée or Sainte-Beuve, the hunted and happy lovers, the joyful and helpful vagabond, merry as Autolycus and trusty as the Fool in *King Lear*, come all under the shadow or the shelter of her presence or her memory. But if any likeness may be found or fancied for any other feature of this poem in the work of other men or of Hugo himself, we can hardly be wrong in affirming that there is not in all the world of poetic invention anything in kind and in degree comparable with the majestic pathos and serene sublimity of the words in which the wise and innocent old woman takes leave of life, and gives death welcome to her weary body and unwearied soul :—

J’ai cent ans. Hier j’ai dit : Mon agonie est proche.  
Ce matin, je m’étais mise sous une roche.  
Nous autres, les esprits et les bêtes des bois,  
Nous voulons finir loin des rumeurs et des voix ;  
Pour qui meurt, toute chose, excepté l’ombre, est fausse.  
La salamandre creuse elle-même sa fosse,  
La taupe va sous terre, et l’aigle encor plus loin,  
Dans le nuage, et l’ours veut tomber sans témoin,  
Et les tigres, rentrant leurs griffes sous leurs ventres,  
Majestueusement meurent au fond des antres ;  
Et quand on est leur femme, et leur sœur, on s’enfuit  
Ainsi qu’eux, on se cache, et l’on rend à la nuit  
Son âme, comme après la bataille, l’épée.

This calm rapture of expectation, which turns towards death with a sort of eager patience and yearning confidence in immortality, is a mood of mind familiar to all students of Hugo as the most habitual temper of his thought, the most instinctive inclination of his spirit, throughout his latter years of life. Sophocles himself has hardly given with such perfection of placid power a

sense of deeper sweetness in the deep mystery of dissolution or transition out of trouble into rest.

Je vais donc m'envoler ! je vais donc être ailleurs !  
 Ah ! je vais savourer, de moi-même maîtresse,  
 La fauve volupté de mourir, et l'ivresse,  
 Fils, d'aller allumer mon âme à ce flambeau  
 Qu'un bras tend à travers le mur noir du tombeau !

But it is mere presumption to cull here and there out of this magnificent forest of verse a handful or so of picked couplets. The scene is so absolutely unique, so wild and sweet and splendid, that neither its pathos nor its grandeur nor its depth and truth of natural instinct can be appreciated or even apprehended except by careful and thankful assimilation of the whole.

In the spring of 1843 Victor Hugo had given to the stage the last great work which he ever deigned to submit to the ordeal of public representation ; in the winter of 1869 he wrote the dramatic poem which of all his plays has most in common with *Les Burgraves*. The Illyria in which the scene is laid bears less likeness to the romantic and fantastic Illyria of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with its Rabelaisian laughter and its Arcadian love-making, than to the epic and tragic Rhineland in which the poet had once before assembled for comparison and contrast the representatives of three various generations. There is a space of twenty-six years, seventeen of them passed in exile, between the dates of these two great poems ; there is a perfect unity of inner concord between the inspiration of the former and the inspiration of the latter. Both have the same epic and heroic note in them, the same atmosphere about them of the forest and the mountain, the same

breadth and dignity of exalted passion, the same high-thoughted harmony of primal and ideal emotions—love of country with love of child and parent, faith in human duty and the divine right of manhood, in the sureness of tragic expiation and the fulness of atoning equity. This dramatic and heroic idyl was written in the year which saw the publication of *L'Homme qui Rit*; the last year of the infamy of France. Three years later Victor Hugo published the tragic record of *L'Année Terrible*, and wrote on a fortunate day in September one of the quaintest, brightest, and finest of his lighter philosophic poems, abounding to exuberance in touches and flashes of his ripest and most thoughtful humour. The tattered sage who enlightens the good-natured marquis on the cognate questions of the supreme being and ‘the eternal female’ has in him something of Villon and something of Omar Kháyyám. Next year Hugo wrote an idyl in dialogue which recalls by more qualities than one the method and the instinct, the grace and the daring, of Theocritus; and in the year following this the complaint of a king condemned to live in lifelong isolation of omnipotence and lifelong separation from all possible assurance of simple and self-satisfying love. These are the latest in date of the verses comprised in this volume.

Sans l'amour ce n'était pas la peine de naître,  
 Et cela ne vous sert à rien d'être le maître,  
 L'empereur, le César, l'homme unique et pensif.  
 Être aimé, c'est avoir l'œil clair et décisif,  
 Le front gai, l'esprit prompt, le cœur fort, l'âme haute.  
 Autrement, si les cœurs, sans que ce soit ma faute,  
 Me sont fermés, tout est ingrat, rien n'est vermeil;  
 Si l'on ne m'aime pas, qu'importe le soleil

Avec sa grande flamme inutile ? Qu'importe  
 Le frais avril ouvrant aux papillons sa porte,  
 Le doux mai dont j'ai droit de nier la chaleur,  
 Et qu'est-ce que cela me fait que l'arbre en fleur  
 Frissonne, et que le chant des oiseaux se confonde  
 Avec l'hymne du vent dans la forêt profonde !

But besides these seven little plays and the bright epigrammatic prologue which introduces them in an amœbæan dialogue between Tragedy and Comedy—besides these living and imperishable flowers of exile—we know that Victor Hugo must have left other samples of his dramatic genius, for which no place has been found in this volume. For more than thirty years, we have it on the evidence of his wife and son, four acts of a tragedy long since promised lay awaiting the completion of the fifth; the advertisement of *Les Jumeaux* was therefore no such absolute delusion as the famous announcement of *La Quiquengrogne*, the historical romance of which not a line was ever written. And Théophile Gautier, in an article dated August 5th, 1844, on the appearance of a piratical piece of rubbish produced by two thievish playhouse hacks under the title of *Don César de Bazan*, informs us that 'Victor Hugo himself, feeling the same affection for the child of his brain that Shakespeare had for Falstaff and Beaumarchais for Figaro, has written a comedy entitled *Une Aventure de Don César de Bazan*. The resolution taken by the poet to have no more plays acted has prevented him from bringing it on the stage, but no doubt it will some day appear in the shape of a book, and the true, the only César de Bazan will then revive in his own very likeness.'

The day so long since anticipated by the most loyal

and faithful of Hugo's earlier disciples has already been too long deferred. And even were the unfinished tragedy, instead of being so nearly perfect, as far from completion as Shakespeare's posthumous fragment or torso of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, we should yet have a right to it as it stands, knowing as we do that when it comes to us we shall receive it undeformed and unenlarged by any such incongruous even if not unlovely additions as were held needful to complete the last unfinished masterpiece of Shakespeare.

## II.

## 'LA FIN DE SATAN.'

1886.

MORE than thirty years have elapsed between the announcement and the appearance of the great religious poem which has done for the nineteenth century what was done for the thirteenth by the *Divina Commedia* and for the seventeenth by *Paradise Lost*; which has given us, from the hand of its greatest representative writer, the fullest, the clearest, the loftiest exposition of his personal faith; and which may therefore be not unreasonably accepted as a sign of the spiritual tone or tendency natural to the minds of its noblest and tenderest and most fearless thinkers: a tone of austere and serene hopefulness, a tendency towards profound and passionate confidence in the ultimate redemption and absorption of evil by good, of the perishable power of darkness by the eternal omnipotence of light. This great enterprise was undertaken in the third year of the author's exile, and resumed after the lapse of six years more. At the former date, we are told, he completed the first of the three projected parts into which the poem was to be divided—*The Sword, The Gibbet, The Prison*—and almost all the 'extra-human' prelude, interludes, and conclusion, which fall naturally into five

several sections. In all these the first quality which strikes the reader is one more proper to Indian than to Hebrew genius: a love of enormous images, gigantic impossibilities, unimaginable exaggerations of illimitable space and immeasurable time. Only the poet's matchless mastery of language, his incomparable command of radiant symbol and rolling music, could make a western student not all unwilling to accept this more than Cyclopean or Titanic architecture of fancy without a sense of incredulous distaste for incongruous or inconceivable conceptions. But all demur, all question, all doubt is swallowed up in wonder and delight at the glory and the beauty of the indefatigable song. The flight of the fallen archangel towards the dying sun through chaos is given with that all but unique effect which Dante alone could hitherto achieve by alternation or combination of the very homeliest with the very sublimest images or comparisons.

Et les glaciers mêlés aux nuits qui leur ressemblent  
Se renversaient ainsi que des bêtes qui tremblent,  
Et les noirs tourbillons et les gouffres hideux  
Se courbaient éperdus, pendant qu'au-dessus d'eux,  
Volant vers l'astre ainsi qu'une flèche à la cible,  
Passait, fauve et hagard, ce suppliant terrible.

Neither Milton nor Byron—though the latter was here at his best and far above the usual level of his more ambitious writing—has equalled, or nearly equalled, the description of the deluge with which the mundane part of this poem opens.

Le mal avait filtré dans les hommes. Par où ?  
Par l'idole ; par l'âpre ouverture que creuse  
Un culte affreux dans l'âme humaine ténébreuse.

Ces temps noirs adoraient le spectre Isis-Lilith,  
 La fille du démon, que l'Homme eut dans son lit  
 Avant qu'Ève apparût sous les astres sans nombre ;  
 Monstre femme que fit Satan avec de l'ombre  
 Afin qu'Adam goûtât le fiel avant le miel,  
 Et le baiser du gouffre avant celui du ciel.

The ensuing list of human crimes begotten by idolatry has the roll of thunder in the deepening cadence of its abrupt and resonant verse.

Ce que la mort assise au seuil noir du tombeau  
 Voyait d'horreurs, faisait parler cette muette.

\* \* \* \* \*

L'urne du gouffre alors se pencha. Le jour fuit ;  
 Et tout ce qui vivait et marchait devint nuit.

The submersion and revival of the world are painted with equal force of hand and subtlety of sublime detail ; and the resurrection of the spectral goddess of evil, the surviving soul of the wicked dead world, armed with the three weapons—the nail, the staff, and the stone—used by Cain in the slaying of Abel, sets a crown of culminating terror on the tragic imaginations of the legend. For with the first of these three instruments of murder the prophetic word of the spectre proclaims that man shall make the sword, and war shall be born from the weapon of iron ; the wood shall rear him gibbets, and the stone shall build him prisons. The legend of Nimrod, in whom the sword is incarnate and war personified, composes the first book of the main poem. Its wild enormities of hyperbolical invention, which now and then recall the Eddas as well as the Vedas, are relieved by passages of such divine tenderness and sweetness as the prayer or thanksgiving of the outcast leper for the



happiness of that humankind which has cast him out : an interlude of as profound and exquisite beauty as anything—though this is a bold word—in the whole range of the author's work ; perfect above all in its antiphonal contrast to the tragic monologue of the bloodthirsty eunuch, whose counsels of homicide blow ever hotter and higher the flames of the ferocity of Nimrod :—

Malheur à ce qui vit ! Malheur à ce qui luit !  
 Je suis le mal, je suis le deuil, je suis la nuit.  
 Malheur ! Pendant qu'au bois le loup étreint la louve,  
 Pendant que l'ours ému cherche l'ourse et la trouve,  
 Que la femme est à l'homme, et le nid à l'oiseau,  
 Que l'air féconde l'eau tremblante, le ruisseau  
 L'herbe, et que le ramier s'accouple à la colombe,  
 Moi l'eunuque, j'ai pris pour épouse la tombe !

As it would require a fuller and more elaborate commentary than can here be undertaken to give even a summary notice of all the developments of his original idea contained in this the greatest mythical invention of the greatest among modern poets, I pass over the exquisite verses which embody the strange and subtle myth of the birth of the angel Freedom from the glance of God upon the remaining feather of the fallen archangel's fallen wings which had not shared his fall into the abyss of hell ; and I pass on at once to consideration of the magnificent poem on the Passion of Christ which seems to me the very finest part of this supernatural and spiritual epic. The only other sacred poem known to me which can from any point of view be compared to it is Milton's *Paradise Regained* ; and those only who would object to the daring reverence of the English

poet's invention can logically or consistently object to the reverent daring with which the French poet also has added incidents to the evangelic record and words to the reported words of Christ. The opening picture of the world under Tiberius may be matched against anything of the same superb and terrible kind in the *Légende des Siècles*, and is as fresh, as vigorous, as new, and as original as though the poet had never done any work of the sort before :—

Cette inondation de Rome était lugubre ;  
 L'empire était partout comme une onde insalubre ;  
 Il croissait comme un fleuve épars sous des forêts,  
 Et changeait lentement l'univers en marais.  
 Les docteurs méditaient sur ce second déluge.  
 Ayant leurs livres saints pour cime et pour refuge,  
 Les prêtres, rattachés aux textes, au-dessus  
 Des hommes débordés dans le gouffre aperçus,  
 Laissaient couler sous eux ces mornes avalanches,  
 Pareils à des serpents enroulés dans des branches.

Un peuple commandait, le monde subissait.  
 Les jaguars, les lions, les ours pris au lacet,  
 Le tigre redouté même de sa femelle,  
 Rugissaient sous les pieds de Rome pêle-mêle  
 Avec les nations dans le même filet.  
 Partout la servitude à voix basse parlait.  
 L'unique grandeur d'âme était l'insouciance.  
 La force avait le droit. Qu'était la conscience ?  
 De la reptilité sous de l'écrasement.  
 On regardait l'autel en face et le serment,  
 Et l'on se parjurait, et l'hymne et la huée  
 Riaient, et l'âme humaine était diminuée.

Every line in the portraits of Herod the tetrarch and the high priest Caiaphas, which succeed this picture of a

humbled world, displays the same breadth of handling and the same precision of touch. The majestic roll and pause and resonance of the verse can be matched only in the other works of the poet's ripest and richest period; the subtle force of effect conveyed by the selection and collocation of names may be likened to that attained in the finest similar passages of *Æschylus* or of *Milton*. The licence which designates the father of the Herod then reigning as the Herod who was eaten alive by worms is, if not an oversight, an instance of such freedom in the treatment of history or tradition as reminds us rather of the mediæval poets—admirable poets in the rough, and vigorous playwrights in the bud—to whom we owe those mysteries and miracle-plays now too generally regarded as mere quaint antiquarian curiosities, but actually full of humorous and earnest life, of rude dramatic realism relieved and ennobled by interludes of lyric passion. The condensed sweetness and the exquisite purity of the verses which describe the character and the works of Christ are not more perfect than is the massive sublimity of the magnificent harangue delivered by the doctor of the law, in which all the centuries of consecrated carnage and sacrificial massacre in honour of the almighty and implacable God of hosts are evoked as with the blast of trumpets, and pass before us with sound of storm and glitter of battle. As it ceases, the word of the new commandment replies:—

Toute la loi d'en haut est dans un mot : aimer.

Peuple, cria le prêtre, on vient de blasphémer.

The introduction of the Sibyl into a narrative con-

structed on the basis of the evangelic record is another instance of sympathy with the imaginative side of early mediæval faith or tradition such as coupled the names of David and the Sibyl, as cognate and coequal authorities, in the sublimest of all Christian hymns. The soliloquy of the prophetess is comparable with anything in the whole work of Victor Hugo for exaltation of passionate thought and subtlety of meditative expression ; its verbal and metrical quality is miraculous for supple and superb command of every resource possible to language when kindled into statelier music or exalted into more strenuous emotion or refined into more exquisite eloquence than can be attained by the loftiest and keenest reasoning, clothed in the choicest and purest rhetoric, to which the foremost of prose writers can attain. As from the doctor of the law we heard the voice of doctrine, of imperious orthodoxy and autocratic faith, so from the dweller among visions we hear now the voice of mysticism, of desperate meditation on the insoluble, of hopeless disdain for human weakness and presumption, of bitter and angry resignation, of bewildered and barren and unprofitable belief. From the simple gospel of good will to men, the message of service and salvation to the weak, the creed of the formalist is not more wholly alien, more utterly averse, than are the visions of the mystic.

But the second division of this book is fuller even than the first of sublime and various beauties. No commentary could explain, no panegyric could express, the quality of inspiration which animates alike the description of the outcast fire-worshipper whose trade is the making of crosses, and who reflects, when a gibbet of

special size is ordered by the high priest's priestly messenger, that they seem inclined to do honour to Barabbas ; the magical charm, the inexpressible melody, the tender colour and the rapturous passion of the canticle which follows ; the splendid sweetness and simplicity of a relation which paints in more vivid detail than Tintoretto's the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem ; the deep and burning pathos of Mary Magdalen's appeal to the Virgin Mother for help in the task of saving the threatened Saviour from Judas and the priests ; the straightforward purity and fidelity of the paraphrase which versifies and expands the narrative in its progress from Gethsemane to Calvary. But in all the world of imaginative creation it would be impossible to find a conception more august, an invention more sublime, than that which brings the released Barabbas, wandering in stupefaction of bewilderment through the supernatural horror of darkness, to the foot of the cross on which his groping hands encounter the feet of Christ. The imagination is so magnificent that nothing less than Victor Hugo's incomparable power of style could possibly have sufficed to shape it into speech and transfuse it into song. He alone among all great poets of the world could have put into the robber's mouth that cry of shame and horror which here breaks forth in thunder of denunciation against the monstrous choice of the people whose verdict has set him free.

Oh ! si c'était à moi qu'on se fût adressé,  
Si, quand j'avais le cou scellé dans la muraille,  
Pilate était venu me trouver sur ma paille,  
S'il m'avait dit : ' Voyons, on t'en laisse le choix,  
C'est une fête, il faut mettre quelqu'un en croix,

Ou Christ de Galilée, ou toi la bête fauve ;  
Réponds, brigand, lequel des deux veux-tu qu'on sauve ?'  
J'aurais tendu mes poings et j'aurais dit : Clouez !

If no other passage of this great poem is quite equal in direct intensity of impression to the picture of Barabbas at the cross, yet it is superfluous to say that every part which follows on this transcendent episode is worthy of the place it holds in a structure of epic and lyric song left unhappily unfinished. The close or epilogue of the second book is a stern and sorrowful impeachment of Christian crime and the religion that educes Caiaphas from Jesus. In the majestic fragment which succeeds we hear a change in the cry of the fallen archangel, from the note of a triumphant hatred and defiance to the note of a passionate and desperate love of God, renascent and reluctant, in the imperious eternity of hell.

The second great lyrical interlude of the poem, even sweeter if possible than the divine canticle of Bethphage, is the song of thanksgiving of the birds. The exquisite and melodious old metre in which it is written was first used by Victor Hugo in July 1828; but even the famous *orientale* in which all the graces of Ronsard and all the raptures of Belleau were at once rekindled and eclipsed can hardly be set quite beside this miracle of music, this sustained passion of praise and joyful adoration which rings through fifty stanzas of faultless and unflagging and incomparable song. The two interludes which should have accompanied it, the chant of the stars and the hymn of the angels, are wanting; no man's imagination will ever be competent to supply a single line of these. But apparently not much is left incomplete of

La parole qu'on dit tout bas, qui n'est pas vraie,  
 L'obscur tressaillement du blé qu'étreint l'ivraie,  
 La gangrène qui vient mordre la plaie à vif,  
 Le chuchotement noir des flots noyant l'esquif,  
 Le silence du chien près du nid de la grive,  
 J'entends tout, je n'échappe à rien, et tout m'arrive  
 À la fois dans ce bain où je suis submergé ;  
 Tous les fléaux en moi retentissent ; et j'ai  
 Le contre-coup de tous les monstres ; et je songe,  
 Écoutant la fureur, la chute, le mensonge  
 De toute cette race immonde de Japhet ;  
 Je distingue le bruit mystérieux que fait  
 Dans une conscience un forfait qu'on décide ;  
 O nuit ! je sens Néron devenir parricide.

Nothing could be worthy to follow this but what follows—the wailing cry of the deathless and sleepless spirit of evil for but one hour of sleep :—

Sommeil, lieu sombre, espace ineffable, où l'on est  
 Doux comme l'aube et pur comme l'enfant qui naît !  
 Dormir, ô guérison, détachement, rosée,  
 Stupeur épanouie, immense ombre apaisée,  
 Repos sacré, douceur muette, bercement  
 Qui trempe dans les cieux les cœurs, noir et charmant !

The prelude of the third book is one of the sublimest poems which compose the mythic or symbolic part of the poet's work. In all the vast compass of that world of song where only we can find its like we can find nothing more majestic in its ardour of imagination than the myth of the angel Liberty, the description of her descent, the pictures of winter everlasting and eternal night, of the spectre which resists and perishes, of the supreme appeal which evokes at last a word from the

sleeping spirit of evil. Every line, every word, is laden with significant loveliness and alive with vivid emotion.

It is a matter for infinite regret that the splendid fragment on the Bastille should be but a fragment. No more superb and terrible piece of workmanship was ever left unfinished. No section of the poem contains verses of more perfect and incisive simplicity than these :—

Quel est ce prisonnier, et comment on le nomme,  
Après dix ou douze ans personne ne le sait ;  
Pas même lui. La dalle ignore ce que c'est ;  
Le carcan le saisit au cou sans le connaître ;  
Et le ver, qui déjà goûte à sa chair peut-être,  
Ne peut dire son nom au rat qui glisse et fuit.

We can but guess and wonder from afar off with what passionate magnificence of rapture the poet would have sung the fall of the typic prison, with what subtle and inspired audacity he would have made it symbolize the end of all evil, the annihilation of hell, the redemption and resurrection of the fallen angel himself, whose work and whose dwelling-place and whose existence were exemplified and typified and embodied in that human house of torment. Only a few lines are vouchsafed us of the final utterance in which the supreme word of forgiveness, the proclamation of atonement wrought and of opposites reconciled by the angel Liberty, should have found ultimate and complete expression. But the message of the poem is none the less delivered, its mission is none the less fulfilled: we are none the less qualified to compare it, and justified in comparing it, as to scheme and execution alike, with the poems of Dante and of Milton. In sharpness of outline and precision of touch it is Dantesque rather than Miltonic; in sustained



magnificence of rolling music, in constancy of exaltation, in epic stateliness and splendour of imagery, it is Miltonic rather than Dantesque. But for absolute effect of sublimity it can hardly be compared with the first and second books of *Paradise Lost*; its milder and wiser tone of ethics and religion does not raise it—I am not sure that it does not prevent it from rising—to the tremendous height and grandeur of moral impression produced by the heroism of Milton's irreconcilable and irredeemable archangel. The Asiatic tendency to push invention beyond the limit of what may be called permissible impossibility, which distinguishes—if we may not say disfigures—no inconsiderable part of the poem, precludes it from the attainment of such a complete hold on the reader's imaginative belief, such entire command of his deepest and most sympathetic emotion, as is at once achieved by the Satan of Milton. And this same indulgence of excess in such material fancies as rather deform than exalt the religious imagination of Hindoo mythologists deprives it no less of the crowning quality which glorifies the whole work of Dante: the logic of imagination which gives exactitude and consistency to every detail of his scheme, and makes the impossible not possible merely, but demonstrable as well as credible for all who consent to accept the first premiss or postulate of his faith. Contrast, for example, the material contradictions involved in such a myth as that of Nimrod's attempt to scale heaven, and the perfect coherence of that which makes of the Peak of Teneriffe the mountain of purgatory, with hell for its inverse descent. The materialism of Dante's invention, however quaint and even gross it may seem to modern thinkers, is utterly at

one with itself throughout: the materialism of Hugo's is so self-contradictory, so inconsistent in its accumulation of incompatible impossibilities, that we cannot even imagine a momentary and fantastical acceptance of it, a passing or fanciful belief in anything but the majestic harmony, the inexhaustible imagery, which clothe its naked incongruities with splendour. For this among other reasons I venture to prefer the second to the first division of the poem; and of all its countless beauties and sublimities the crowning example is for me that incomparable passage in which the pathetic and passionate imagination of the poet has conceived and has realized the anguish of Barabbas at the foot of the cross of Christ.

## III.

## 'CHOSSES VUES.'

1887.

SUCH books as Coleridge's *Table Talk* and Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* will always hold their place among the most interesting and the most valuable of all our literary possessions ; and not least on this account, that they enable us to measure, without diminution of rational reverence or danger of unseemly disrespect, the limitations and the qualifications no less than the capacities and the achievements of the highest intelligences which have ever found expression in literature. At one moment we feel a very rapture of admiration for the marvellous accuracy of instinct, the subtle sublimation of good sense, the superb sureness of intuition, discernible and appreciable in the lightest and slightest remark which reveals the inborn force and splendour of the speaker's peculiar and incomparable faculty or ability ; at another we are startled if not saddened by the revelation of some unexpected flaw in the spiritual structure, some incongruous infirmity in the composition of his magnificent and many-sided understanding. Very singular criticisms, and predictions even stranger than these, are strewn broadcast as at random among some of the finest and wisest utterances recorded in each

of those famous books ; but they do not in any least degree affect the claim of either poet on our general and grateful admiration. Servility and loyalty are so far from being akin that they are mutually exclusive and destructive : the loyal and rational veneration of a free and serious thinker cannot coexist with the abject and superstitious acquiescence of a prostrate and unreasoning worshipper. I trust that neither Goethe nor Coleridge would have exacted or enjoyed such a tribute to his genius as the sacrifice of a disciple's conscience—the immolation of another man's freedom of thought and utterance on the altar of his assumed authority : I know that Victor Hugo would not. In the posthumous volume which gives us the register of his opinions and experiences, personal and political, during many years of life, there are many notes and memoranda of high and serious interest. There is nothing unimportant to the student of a great character and a transcendent genius even in the slightest entries ; even in the most questionable inferences from history or tradition, in the most untenable inductions or deductions from experience or from theory. His vivid and varied power of intelligence is not more generally manifest than the single-hearted fervour of his confidence, the passionate and childlike spontaneity of his charitable or indignant sympathies. This book alone would suffice to prove that the greatest writer born in the nineteenth century had wit enough for a cynic combined with enthusiasm enough for an apostle. At its very opening the summary sketch of Talleyrand is a model at once of historic and humorous analysis. 'Il était noble comme Machiavel, prêtre comme Gondi, défroqué comme Fouché, spirituel

comme Voltaire et boiteux comme le diable. Il avait approché, connu, observé, pénétré, remué, retourné, approfondi, raillé, fécondé, tous les hommes de son temps, toutes les idées de son siècle.' A paltry sputter of Parisian discontent in 1839 gave occasion for one among many proofs of Victor Hugo's quiet intrepidity and observant presence of mind, and for one among a thousand instances of the graphic and incisive power of realism which the most passionate, imaginative, and sublime of modern poets could display at will in his description of actual and often of homely or prosaic incidents. A full field for the exercise of this power was afforded by his notes, taken on the spot, of the ceremonial reinterment of Napoleon in 1840. The avowedly and obtrusively satirical description of that affair given by Thackeray has nothing in it of keener and shrewder sarcasm than we find in one or two passages of the account given by a then idolatrous admirer of the ideal Napoleon, deified and transfigured by filial and patriotic sympathies. 'Ainsi, statue de bronze en plâtre, Victoires d'or massif en carton-pierre, manteau impérial en tissu de verre, et, quinze jours après la cérémonie,—aigles à vendre.'

No honest and reasonable Englishman who may be pained or offended by the tone of certain remarks on England occurring in such of these notes as bear date under the reign of Louis Philippe, or in other books of Victor Hugo's belonging to the same period of his life, to the same stage in the evolution of his opinions and his powers, should ever forget, or fail to take duly and fully into account, the dates and the circumstances which explain what would be inexplicable and excuse what

would be inexcusable except on consideration of these. In the sons of the soldiers of Napoleon we must forgive even when we cannot applaud the loyal aberrations of inherited antipathy and of national self-esteem. The illusion of unconscious rancour and unselfish vanity which inspired the singular prophecy or prevision of France and Germany banded together in the interest of progress, in the cause of civilization, against the violence and the cunning of their allied and common enemies, England and Russia,<sup>1</sup> can provoke now no harsher emotion than one of sorrowful though smiling pity. But readers of a future generation will surely be perplexed when they find that Frenchmen in 1847 had an impression that England could be cowed or bullied out of a position which would have been maintained with insolence against a rival who had shown himself conciliatory. Was Mr. Gladstone, they will ask themselves, the representative of English character and of English policy at a date so much earlier than that assigned by historians to the momentary humiliation of England under the cringing guidance or the passing influence of her worst ruler and her most malignant enemy?

This hereditary and unseasonable malevolence stands out strikingly in contrast with the cordial good sense of Louis Philippe's reported remarks on his reception in England three years earlier. Indeed, the general view given in these pages of the first and last king of the French is so simply and so genuinely attractive as to remind us only of the finer features in that immortal portrait, taken from memory, of the same figure in *Les Misérables*. But at least as much interest as we

<sup>1</sup> *Le Rhin* : Conclusion. 1841.

can feel in the son of *Égalité* will be universally aroused by the original of Fantine. The record of the incident which suggested one of the most famous chapters in the great work just mentioned is as vivid and pathetic as it is characteristic and illustrative of that genius of beneficence which was so great a component part of the moral and intellectual faculty of Victor Hugo. Again we may be reminded of a chapter in the same volume of his second great masterpiece in prose fiction, when we read the singularly lucid record of a dream bearing date four months after the accidental death of the Duke of Orleans. This record has all the tragic truthfulness of incoherence, all the vivid confusion of significant with fantastic details, which we recognize in the immortal and incomparable vision of Jean Valjean on the eve of his first great act of self-immolation. And the hand which could thus carve the outlines of the dark and chisel the features of a shadow could also transcribe or portray with the realism of a professional reporter the talk of kings and ministers, the interior of palaces and prisons, the record of political and of criminal trials, anecdotes, studies, sketches, epigrams, reflections, revolutions, deliberations, intercessions, observations, and appeals. Two characters were always more especially his, whatever other part he might be called upon by circumstances to combine with them : the student's and the mediator's. All his logic, all his reason, all his conscience, had been resolved by nature into a single quality or instinct, the principle or the impulse of universal and immitigable charity. All his argument on matters of social controversy is based on the radical and inprescriptible assumption that no counter consideration can

be valid, that no other principle exists. All moral evil must in his judgment be regarded as disease, to be healed or allayed by a process of criminal sanitation ; unless indeed it be merely the consequence of social inequalities, the upshot of legal iniquities, the result of systematic dereliction on the part of the world at large. The blackest traitor and seller of blood, the most hideous assassin or infanticide, holds his life by a right as inviolable as that of the most innocent child or the most virtuous man alive.

'Principles never prove their grandeur and their beauty more than when they defend even those whom pity itself defends no longer.' Now, with all possible deference for the single-hearted and single-eyed enthusiasm of benevolence which inspired this dogma, the disciple most humbly conscious of his inferiority to so great and good a man as was the master-poet of the nineteenth century might be permitted and should not shrink from availing himself of the permission to suggest that there is here either a manifest assumption or a manifest confusion of terms. What stands before us is not a principle ; it is a superstition. A superstition may be the veil of indisputable truth, the raiment of imperishable wisdom ; it may also be nothing of the sort. It is not enough for even a prophet or apostle to take in hand (as it were) a superstition, to sprinkle it with the living water of eloquence, and to say, 'In the name of faith, hope, and charity, I baptize thee Principle.' The original sin of assumption, the inherent corruption of a fallacy, is not so lightly to be cast out. 'You have no right,' cries the preacher, 'to touch a hair of the worst man's head in the way of legal penalty.' 'That,'



a hearer might reply, 'remains to be proved ; meantime, affirmation for affirmation, I maintain that I have a right, should it please me, to make slippers of his skin, dog's meat of his flesh, and mortar of his bones.' Such a retort might provoke from French philanthropy the favourite Parisian exclamation of 'Schoking !' But to some consciences, less tender or more tender as it may be, there is no horror more horrible than the notion that a creature convicted of such crimes as (for example) matricide on the score of avarice, professional infanticide by starvation, or deliberate murder of a little child by systematic graduation of torture, should be knowingly allowed for one unnecessary hour to desecrate creation and to outrage humanity by the survival of a monstrous and maleficent existence. To contravene the dogmatic thesis of inviolability is not to defend the gallows or to champion the guillotine ; it is simply to maintain the truth of the simple truism that, except in matters of theology, doctrine is not equivalent to proof nor authority synonymous with evidence.

It would have been well, if I may venture on the suggestion, had the editors to whom the sacred task of publication was confided thought fit to afford the student a few illustrative or explanatory notes, as simple and concise as possible, on various subjects referred to in this volume as matters of universal notoriety. It is true that the incomparable lucidity of the text leaves nothing of serious importance too difficult for the reader of a later generation to apprehend or to appreciate in its general bearing and significance ; but in more instances than one a brief epitome of the actual facts, with a brief summary of the concomitant circumstances, would have

enhanced at once the dramatic interest and the historic value of the record. However, what is most precious in the book is naturally independent of all such considerations. At every turn we recognize the fine insight and the accurate scrutiny of a born student 'in nature's infinite book of secrecy.' The following observation is suggested by an interview with a young prisoner under sentence of death for murder, who talked in newspaper style. 'In all the rest of the conversation I remarked this absence of natural expression. Everything fades away in sight of death except affectation. Goodnature vanishes, malevolence departs, the kindly man becomes bitter, the rough man becomes gentle, the affected man remains affected. Strange that death should touch you and not make you simple !'

That Victor Hugo, when he pleased, could be as great and as mere a naturalist, in the pure and genuine sense of the term, as the most absolute devotee of photographic realism, a single instance in this single book would amply suffice to show. The study 'after nature' of a girl then living with a painter would have kindled the admiration of Balzac and the envy of a meaner artist. There are touches in it that remind us of Esther Gobseck, and others that remind us of Doll Tearsheet. The reality of the animal under either phase, cynical or sentimental in self-devotion or self-exposure, must be recognizable by the veriest novice in that field of scientific research.

A more tragic piece of nature is the dramatic study of Mlle Georges in the days of her decadence, when the beauty to which Napoleon had bowed, and the genius which for two generations had ruled the stage of Paris,

were eclipsed by the fiery star of Rachel, and slighted by the putative nephew of her once imperial lover. But an interest far different in kind and in degree belongs to the record of the death of Balzac—the sudden and untimely collapse of the only figure in France intellectually comparable in any way to the figure of Victor Hugo.

Few sections of this book are more remarkable than that which narrates the detection and trial of a spy before a tribunal of the exiles whose bread he had eaten and whose trust he had betrayed. And in this narrative there is nothing more noteworthy than the combination of practical sense and theoretical dogmatism in the counsels of Victor Hugo himself. Not to spare the rascal's life would have been sheer madness; there could have been no rational reply to the argument from expediency. But to the argument from principle, that there must be no such thing as a sentence of capital punishment, no more against a spy than against a parricide, it does seem singular that no voice should have replied, No more? Most certainly not; if anything, less. But what man on earth could dream of asking for more?

There are many lessons, direct and indirect, to be derived from the study of this book; but the crowning moral of it all is given at the close, as the final result and summary of all its author's manifold experiences. That there is but one thing under heaven to which a man should bow—genius; and but one to which a man should kneel—goodness. And while reverence endures for either, the veneration of all time will cherish the memory of Victor Hugo.

## IV.

## 'LES JUMEAUX.'

1889.

IN his admirable preface to his admirable translation of Shakespeare's *Pericles* the son of the greatest dramatist and poet whom the world has seen since the death of Shakespeare makes mention of an unfinished poem which for many years past must have been for hundreds and thousands of would-be readers a supreme and crowning object of intense curiosity and more intense desire. Two plays, *Torquemada* and *Les Jumeaux*, were advertised as existing, if not as forthcoming, as far back as the year 1856. In 1882 the world was enriched for ever by the appearance of *Torquemada*. Of that sublime and pathetic tragedy its author was reported to have said that he thought it 'one of his master-works'—'une de mes maîtresses œuvres.' But of the other—to the deep and bitter disappointment of us all—not a word of hint or promise was vouchsafed which might have encouraged the patient lover of poetry to possess his soul in peace, remembering the words of the author's son in 1867 :—

Sans chercher très-loin, je pourrais vous fournir la preuve qu'il peut y avoir un bien long intervalle entre la conception et la publication d'un ouvrage. Je connais depuis 1839 les quatre premiers actes d'un drame intitulé, je crois, *Les Jumeaux* qui attend encore son dénouement au fond de certain portefeuille.

Une raison quelconque a ajourné jusqu'ici la terminaison de cette œuvre qui, commencée dans la seconde manière de l'auteur, sera nécessairement achevée dans la troisième.

Alas, not only was this never to be, but we now find that the four acts are but two and a half: that Hugo has left us just about as much of his *Jumeaux* as Shakespeare left of his *Two Noble Kinsmen*. And Shakespeare had the excuse of premature and unexpected death: Hugo, dying at eighty-three, had had forty-six years in which to complete the great work interrupted by illness in 1839. It is impossible not to wish, and to wish with an almost resentful or repining acerbity of regret, that some part of the time and toil devoted during so many active years of indefatigable energy to work less precious and to interests less enduring had been given to the completion of another imperishable and incomparable masterpiece. Every line of Dante, of Milton, or of Hugo, will always have its interest for special students; but the most indiscriminately omnivorous of these would lament if the composition of the *Convito* or of *Tetrachordon* had interfered with the composition and cut off the completion of *Paradise Lost* or the *Divina Commedia*.

Perhaps, however, explanation may in this case be less unattainable than consolation, and less inconceivable than it seems. Three times Victor Hugo undertook to deal with the unspeakably terrible and tragic subject of the oldworld prison; and three times he abandoned—or would seem to have abandoned—the intolerable and unmanageable task. *La Quinquengrogne*—the romance which was to do for the dungeon what *Notre Dame de Paris* had done for the cathedral—was never even begun: the section of *La Fin de Satan* which should

have dealt with the Bastille is such a fragment as leaves the reader athirst—and astonished at the instinct which impelled the greatest of modern poets to complete his wild preternatural legend or invention of Nimrod's attack on God and leave unfinished some of the most glorious and marvellous pages that ever thrilled with terror or fortified with pity the mind of a reader not unworthy to read them. The monstrous Asiatic extravagance of the story of Nimrod is unimpressive—except by the splendour of diction and versification—for readers unimbued with the traditions of 'l'Inde monstrueuse et triste'; the picture of the infernal French prison, truncated and curtailed and dismembered as it is, stands out on the background of memory as one of the painter's most awful and most beautiful successes. But he could not—we cannot suppose that he would not—finish it: and he did not finish the play which might probably have been his greatest. That is a bold word, and may well be thought something more than bold: yet I must venture to repeat it—to affirm that if this play had been carried through on the same great lines and completed in the same great style as it was begun, it must have taken precedence even of *Marion de Lorme* or *Le Roi s'amuse*, *Ruy Blas* or *Les Burgraves*. And if we were not to have it in full, and enjoy it as we enjoy *Hamlet* or *Othello*, we might surely have hoped to possess such a comparatively satisfactory fragment—such a comparatively sufficient skeleton—as Shakespeare left us in each of his two imperfect plays. We are not reduced to the hopeless and helpless necessity of conjecture as to how Timon was to pass away, as to how Arcite was to make room for Palamon. Shakespeare had at least sketched

in something more than outline the last scene of either tragedy, and has made it clear beyond all possibility of mistake how his poem would in either case have been finished, had he lived or had he cared to finish it. . But Hugo has given us no hint—the bewildered and brain-sick ingenuity of a German or even an Anglo-German commentator would hardly be able to supply a suggestion—as to how this many-sided and many-coloured tragedy was to be worked out or wound up. Is it possible—we are driven to the question, and compelled to ask ourselves—that even his imagination found itself incapable of conceiving an adequate conclusion, of supplying an acceptable result from so many various and contending sources or springs of interest as he had set in motion here? Such an explanation is all but inadmissible: none other is conceivable. For the power, the skill, the dramatic invention and combination of the first act alone, can hardly be paralleled in any single act of any other play. Its great length is not more exceptional than its vast and marvellous variety of incident and impression: and yet, completed on the same giant scale, the play would apparently have been at least as long as *Cromwell*. With that gigantic work of the poet's earlier prime it has other points in common: for example, the original view and the strenuous grasp of historic problems, the rich and rolling eloquence of dialogue or monologue, the flashing and shifting interchanges of humour and wonder with terror and pity, the supple vitality of intrigue and the sublime exuberance of poetry.

The first title of the unfinished play was, we are told, *Le Comte Jean*: and Jean de Créqui will always be re-

membered as one of his creator's most noble and most memorable creatures. Chivalry, devotion, self-sacrifice, high-mindedness, the dominant qualities of the poet and his heroes, were not more sublimely represented in the preceding figures of the Duke of Ormond, of Saverny and the Marquis de Nangis, of Hernani and Don Ruy Gomez, of Saint-Vallier and Gennaro, of La Tisbe and Ruy Blas, than in the figure introduced in the first scene of this play under the disguise of a mountebank. The real Guillot-Gorju, who helps him into 'the fantastic and ragged costume of Callot's strolling players,' is as bright and quaint a sketch of the born vagabond and honourable reprobate as young Jehan Frolo or the immortal Don César—concerning whom I may remark in passing that we might well have expected to receive in this volume the play long since announced by Théophile Gautier as existing in manuscript under the alluring title of *Une Aventure de Don César de Bazan*.

In the soliloquy which follows, the disguised hero of the play reveals his hatred of Mazarin as plainly as his perplexity with reference to the queen-mother and his anxiety with regard to a girl who is 'mixed up in this dark business.' Then, by a simple and rather daring use of dramatic opportunity or convenient invention, two noblemen enter and pass by, discussing the ruined castle of Plessis-les-Rois, and its communication with that of Compiègne by a subterranean way of which the queen and Mazarin alone have the keys:—

C'est là que se fit, grâce aux dispenses de Rome,  
Le mariage obscur qui la lie à cet homme.  
Comme c'est fort désert, ils y peuvent parler.  
Aussi dit-on qu'ils vont parfois s'y quereller.



LE COMTE DE BUSSY.

Juste. En ce temps-là donc se trouvait à Compiègne  
Un seigneur dont je crains que le nom ne s'éteigne,  
Jean de Créqui.

LE DUC DE CHAULNE.

Pardieu ! c'était un beau garçon !

LE COMTE DE BUSSY.

D'autre part le Plessis avait pour garnison  
Une douce beauté qui vivait fort recluse.  
Jean savait les abords du manoir, et par ruse,  
L'amour aidant, un soir, comme il n'était pas sot,  
Il entra chez la dame et l'emporta d'assaut.  
Or, plus tard il apprit, comment, je ne sais guère,  
Que cette belle était la femme de son frère.  
Je te donne les faits, arrange tout cela.  
Le pire ou le meilleur, c'est qu'à neuf mois de là  
Une fille naquit, fille justifiée  
Et légale, la dame étant fort mariée.  
Oui, mais le comte Jean...—C'est délicat, tu vois.

LE DUC DE CHAULNE.

La fille a nom ?

LE COMTE DE BUSSY.

Alix de Ponthieu. Je la crois  
Orpheline à présent.

That she is the heroine and her father the protagonist of the play it can hardly be necessary to explain : for the pathetic figure of the victim—the 'Man in the Iron Mask'—though designed with all the tenderness and skill, with all the sympathetic imagination and all the

passionate fidelity, which even the greatest poet of our age could bring to bear upon such a subject, must inevitably remain passive—a patient rather than an agent. The two noblemen who have thus conveniently though not unnaturally explained or expounded what it was necessary for the audience or the readers of the play to understand proceed to make way for the man of whom they have been talking as doomed to immediate death if he should reappear. He reappears as a mountebank; but after setting his attendant—the genuine mountebank's crier or herald—to beat the drum before their booth, appeals to this clown; asks whether he is the sort of fellow to do a good deed some day or other. The answer and the following dialogue are beyond praise or description; but we may venture to affirm that Rabelais and Molière might have united in applause of the magnificent effusion of this Tagus.

Rien n'est rare, manants, comme un bon astrologue.

Ben Jonson himself, in the plenitude of his powers, must have acknowledged in the writer of this speech a worthy if not a dangerous rival to the author of *The Alchemist*. But the scene in which the 'lieutenant de police' appears and disappears is worthier of the author of *Measure for Measure* than of the author of *Volpone* or even the author of *Tartuffe*. The condensed and pointed dialogue, in which every reply is a brilliant epigram, and each epigram a suggestive revelation, bears throughout the mark of the writer's incomparable hand; the strange and tragic scene which follows it could not have been more skilfully or more strikingly introduced.

The veiled woman whose identity is revealed by the furtive felicity of felonious chance—'un front bien fier chargé d'un joug bien vil'—is a figure no less pathetic than suggestive of future effect—if only the poem had been completed. An elaborate analysis of these successive scenes would require more time, as it would certainly demand more skill, than I can devote to so delicate and complicated a task. The scene in which the banished Créqui discovers himself to his fellow-nobles and fellow-subjects of ministerial tyranny is as strong in stage effect as it is magnificent in character and passion: but the scene in which he recognizes his daughter in the girl who has devoted herself to an enterprise of such deadly peril as the rescue of the masked prisoner on whom she has set eyes but once brings to a climax of interest the close of an act as long as many plays, and richer than most in variety and intensity of impression.

At the opening of the second act we recognize the terrible gift of pathos which is peculiar to Victor Hugo. No Englishman, remembering Lord Tennyson's *Rizpah* and Mr. Browning's *Pompilia*, will deny that England has produced in our own day such examples of passionate and pathetic poetry as were never and will never be excelled; but this example of Hugo's command over the springs of pity and terror is but one among 'numbers numberless' of proofs that no other poet was ever so possessed by the divine passion of indignant sympathy with innocent or unmerited suffering. The horror and the pity of this most piteous and most horrible story are intensified as well as transfigured by the nobility of treatment, the dignity of conception,

the magnificence of style, which could make all things endurable if seen by the light of so great a mind and so noble a heart as Hugo's.

Le sommeil ne met pas mon âme en liberté.  
Dans mes songes jamais un ami ne me nomme.

Shakespeare, Webster, and Hugo are the only three poets in whose works we can reasonably hope to find anything like that ; or anything like the last six words of the following passage :—

Je dois te faire peur, n'est-ce pas ? J'étais seul  
Tout à l'heure, attendant l'heure où ton Dieu t'envoie,  
—Pardonne !—j'ai maudit ce Dieu qui fait ma joie !  
Il me semblait—vois-tu, je comptais les instants,—  
Que le rayon de jour mettait bien plus de temps  
Qu'à l'ordinaire encor pour gagner cette dalle.—  
Et puis ce masque noir...cette voûte infernale...—  
Quelqu'un qui m'aurait vu m'aurait pris pour un fou !  
Mon esprit s'en allait chercher je ne sais où  
Des rêves, des jardins, des champs pleins d'étincelles  
Où volaient des essaims dont j'enviais les ailes ;  
Je pleurais, j'écoutais si j'entendrais tes pas ;  
Et je ris maintenant !—Mais tu ne le vois pas.

The brilliant stage-craft of the scenes in which the prisoner's escape is effected and the treacherous gaoler is outwitted by the newly disguised Jean de Créquy would suffice for the reputation of the most consummate playwright that ever held an audience breathless by the perfection of his art : but the marvellous portrait of Mazarin in the truncated fragment of the third act may hold its own beside any one of the poet's great historic or tragic studies. His breadth and depth of imaginative

charity are here as conspicuous as in the immortal presentation of Torquemada. At first the minister who stands between a mother and a son, indifferent to her anguish of passionate reproach and confident in his obduracy of unfilial egotism, seems as repulsive a figure as even the heartless and duteless young king ; and the dramatic animation of the dialogue is so vivid and superb that it would seem impossible to modify the first effect, to change or attenuate the first impression of it : matters of state and of sentiment, of policy or of passion, were never wrought and welded into verse of more pathetic and energetic eloquence, of emotion more spontaneous and superb. And yet, when we listen to the monologue of the cold-hearted and implacable statesman, we recognize the utterance of a mightier and a more unselfish mind, a spirit of loftier aim and wider scope of insight and of foresight, than lives or works or speaks in any of the other figures revealed to us on this vast imaginary stage of historic and poetic action. The noble words in which Gautier describes the great monologue of Frederick Barbarossa in the play produced by Victor Hugo three years and six months after the attack of illness which proved fatal to the production of this one might well have served to describe the equally magnificent soliloquy of the high-thoughted and hard-hearted politician, pitiless out of pity for mankind, and relentless out of compassion for suffering. Here also we find 'un de ces beaux monologues politiques où M. Victor Hugo résume, dans une soixantaine de vers, la situation d'un pays, le caractère d'une époque. Il excelle à construire ces espèces de plans à vol d'oiseau, d'où l'on découvre, sous une forme

distincte et réelle, tous les événements d'un siècle. Du haut de sa pensée, la tête vous tourne, comme du sommet d'une flèche de cathédrale.' But even the phrase which follows—'toute cette politique transcendante, en vers d'une beauté cornélienne'—is inadequate to describe the soliloquy now before us: unless indeed there is to be found in the noblest work of Hugo's noblest predecessor on the tragic stage of France a passage of equal length and of equal weight which will bear comparison with the following in substance and in style:—

Rome ! . . . O cité que les ans font courber,  
 Qui parle sans comprendre et penche sans tomber,  
 Si bien qu'en la voyant la pensée indécise  
 De la tour de Babel flotte à la tour de Pise !  
 —Expliquons d'une part, et de l'autre étayons !  
 Hors l'Europe, la France a d'immenses rayons.  
 La France partout veille. Heureuse, forte, armée,  
 Elle éteint en passant toute guerre allumée.  
 Le sophi voudrait prendre avec le Kurdistan  
 Candahar au mogol, Babylone au sultan ;  
 Nous l'avons arrêté. Pour la vente et l'échange  
 Déjà nous remplaçons, du Tigre jusqu'au Gange,  
 Marchands arméniens et marchands esclavons.  
 Partout nous devenons les maîtres ; nous avons  
 Dans l'Inde des soldats, en Chine des jésuites.  
 Nos machines de guerre en tous lieux sont construites ;  
 Sûr moyen de régner sans lutter.—Je suis vieux,  
 Tout brisé par les ans, mes pires envieux ;  
 Je vois déjà, dans l'ombre où pas à pas je tombe,  
 Quelque chose d'ouvert qui ressemble à la tombe.  
 Eh bien, si l'heure sombre est tout proche en effet,  
 Quand Dieu dans mon cercueil me criera : Qu'as-tu fait ?  
 Je pourrai dire : O Dieu, l'onde a battu ma tête ;  
 Quand je suis arrivé, tout n'était que tempête ;

L'esprit des temps nouveaux, l'esprit du temps ancien,  
 Luttaient ; c'était terrible, et vous le savez bien ;  
 Louis onze a livré la première bataille ;  
 François premier, venu pour élargir l'entaille,  
 Est mort à l'œuvre avant que le géant tombât ;  
 Richelieu n'a pas vu la fin du grand combat ;  
 Tous ces hommes, suivant leur loi haute et profonde,  
 Ont fait la guerre.—Moi, je fais la paix du monde !

La paix du monde !—oh ! oui ! spectacle éblouissant !  
 Dans ce travail sacré chaque jour avançant,  
 Je vais. Le roi de France est mon outil sublime.  
 J'ai fini maintenant et je suis sur la cime.  
 Plus d'écueil ! plus d'obstacle !

'The rest is silence.' At this very point this great historic and tragic poem was shipwrecked on the obstacle of sudden illness, and sank to rise no more but as the fragment, the waif, the derelict now stranded, with all its imperfect treasure and all its unaccomplished promise, before our defrauded and disappointed eyes. That it should be so is inexplicable, unaccountable, I had well-nigh added unpardonable. But on that subject I will insist no further. Nor can it now be necessary to dwell on the evidence here so amply supplied that no writer born in the same century can more properly be named in the same breath with Hugo than can any contemporary of either predecessor be named in the same breath with Dante or with Shakespeare. The strength and the sweetness, the power and the purity of his inspiration, are not higher above comparison or competition than the reach of his imaginative thought and the grasp of his dramatic intelligence.

Of the juvenile play fashioned with remarkable and precocious dexterity out of Scott's novel of *Kenilworth* it may suffice to say that its promotion to the place which it occupies is somewhat astonishing—in face of the fact that we find in the extract prefixed to it from the biography of its author these not insignificant words : 'Ma foi, dit M. Victor Hugo, je ne regarde pas cela comme une pièce de moi.' Its proper place would have been in the later and enlarged edition of that biography, where it might have served to mark the first step made by the young author in advance of his very earliest attempts. It is interesting, curious, and even admirable as the work of a very young man ; but its appearance among the ripest and most important works—finished or unfinished—of Victor Hugo is not more incongruous than inexplicable.



## V.

*NOTES OF TRAVEL.*

## ALPS AND PYRENEES.

1890.

IT is a fact not less singular than significant that the volume containing Victor Hugo's personal reminiscences of men and events should have had more than twice the sale of any other among his posthumous works. Full of interest, personal and historical, as is the many-coloured record of *Choses Vues*, its crowning interest consists in the fact that the experiences recorded in that book are the experiences of the greatest writer born in the nineteenth century: the value of his other posthumous works consists in the fact that, if no other legacy had been bequeathed by him to time, they would have sufficed to prove him the greatest poet of an age which has been glorified by the advent of Tennyson, Browning, and Leconte de Lisle. The account of his excursions among the Alps at the age of thirty-seven, which occupies less than a quarter of the volume last issued, might perhaps have been conjectured, by a careful and thoughtful student of the man and his work, to belong to the same date as the second series of letters from the Rhine; of which, as the prefatory note informs us, it is simply the sequel.

Most readers will probably agree that the most interesting and important episode in this epistolary journal is the one which has been extracted from a letter to the artist who had the honour of receiving the previous letters from the Rhine. The six letters addressed to the wife of the writer are full to overflowing of evidence to the wonderfully swift, keen, and joyful observation of nature, the amazing quickness of notice, and the astonishing vivacity of recollection, which make it hard for a duller eye and a slower brain to follow the mere transcript of his experiences and impressions. But the story of the mountebanks at Berne, a truncated and incoherent tragedy, could have been written as it is here written by no man that ever lived but the author of *Notre Dame de Paris*; and it is impossible to imagine—though he has vouchsafed no hint to that effect—that the creator of Esmeralda was not reminded of his creation by the sorrowful sight which he has registered for all time in that letter.

The description of Mount Pilatus at the opening of this volume would suffice to show that no such guide-book has ever been written, or ever will be, as Victor Hugo might have given us if he had undertaken the task of anticipating the labours commissioned by Messrs. Murray and Baedeker. But before we come to this nobly vivid and memorable bit of landscape we meet once again with an instance of the artist's ever ready and tender sympathy with all that is beautiful and with all that is sorrowful in the nature and the surroundings of man.

No reader could fail to recognize the hand that traced the lines which follow.

Une madone est sur l'autel [of a chapel erected on the legendary site of the slaying of Gessler] ; devant cette madone est ouvert un livre où les passants peuvent enregistrer leurs noms. Le dernier voyageur entré dans la chapelle y avait écrit ces deux lignes qui m'ont plus touché que toutes les déclarations de guerre aux tyrans dont le livre est rempli : ' Je prie humblement notre sainte mère de Dieu de daigner, par son intercession, faire recouvrer un peu de vue à ma pauvre femme.' Je n'ai rien écrit sur le livre, pas même mon nom. Au-dessous de cette douce prière la page était blanche. Je l'ai laissée blanche.

To those who would compare—not in the vain and foolish hope to arrange the order of precedence or determine the rank of merit, but with the rational and scholarly desire to appreciate the special quality of each—the pictorial power of Hugo with that of such contemporaries as Tennyson and Ruskin, Browning and Carlyle, I would commend the study of such passages as the rapid sketch of the cloud on the summit of Mount Pilatus, and the yet more vivid study of the reflections in the lake of Lucerne. To me they seem to have more in common with the style of the great writer who last entered the Pantheon of England than with that of any other great man.

In the second letter, which deals with Berne and the Righi, there is nothing more striking—as there could be nothing more characteristic—than the picture of the splendid noonday landscape and the hideous idiot who was the only visible spectator of its glories. 'A quoi bon cette ironie dans une solitude? Dois-je croire que le paysage était destiné à lui crétin, et l'ironie à moi passant?' But the third letter is of special and incomparable interest. The spectacle seen by the writer when

at breakfast—'reading while eating,' and reading the leaf which accident laid before him of the tragicomic bible of life—is now as immortal, though merely a record of actual fact, as though it had been a creation of the spectator's fancy; the glance, the touch, the sympathy of genius have made reality for once as real as fiction at its best. If any artist in letters could ever match or beat Jacques Callot on his own line—I do not say that I think this possible (or impossible)—it must certainly be allowed that this master of grotesque and realistic tragedy was the painter of the terrible vagabond who is henceforward as sure of immortality as Clopin Trouillefou himself—even though Clopin be the creation of a poet, and his kinsman be only the creature of reality. But Callot, as far as I know his work, could not have drawn in any way comparable with Hugo's the beautiful and singular figure of the girl who was keeping watch beside this slumbering Caliban of the highways. I cannot venture to attempt a translation of the following lines :—

J'ai vu, sur cette place publique, une fille de seize ans, nette et jolie comme un caillou mouillé, baiser de minute en minute, avec une sorte d'admiration passionnée, les cheveux gras et les mains noires d'un affreux homme endormi qui ne sentait même pas ces douces caresses; je l'ai vue épousseter avec ses doigts roses l'habit de saltimbanque dont ses gracieuses chiquenaudes faisaient sortir de petites nuées de poussière; je l'ai vue chasser les mouches qui importunaient cet immonde dormeur, se pencher sur lui, écouter le bruit de son haleine et contempler tendrement ses bottes éculées; et maintenant je suis tout prêt à applaudir l'écrivain quelconque qui voudra faire un roman intime intitulé : *Histoire mélancolique des amours d'une colombe et d'un pourreau*.

But the sordid and dismal little tragedy in which

these singular actors played their unconscious parts in dumb show before the greatest of tragic dramatists whom the world has seen since Shakespeare is less impressive in its action than in its epilogue, when the fearful old gipsy who had betrayed her rival to the police turns round upon the biggest of the boys hooting and yelling at her, with her arm stretched out, and the voice of a screech-owl, crying, 'There's your gallows.' The whole grim, pathetic, grotesque and lamentable story finds a fitting close in this quaint and ferocious touch of humour.

On the way to Aix-les-Bains Victor Hugo was apparently struck by a rather mediæval or Catholic fancy as to the hieroglyphic significance of letters—Latin letters, of course. The admirable French poet whom his countrymen seem to ignore, and whom Archbishop Trench long since made familiar and dear to all English lovers of mediæval Latin verse at its loveliest and quaintest, might have rejoiced to exchange fancies with his more illustrious countryman as to the significance of the alphabet: the fantastic elaboration of fancy, devout and inventive, is not more characteristic of Victor Hugo than of Adam de Saint-Victor.

The short letter on Geneva is as trenchant and curt in its sarcastic expression of disgust as Swift or Carlyle could have made it; whether just or unjust, rational or whimsical, a stranger to that city cannot judge. But I want words to say how grievously I am disappointed by this cruel and libellous description of a city where the sea and the sun would seem to have united their beauties and their forces in an attempt—I do not say a successful attempt—to rival the triumphant and incomparable charm of Venice: 'Marscille est un amas de

maisons sous un beau ciel, voilà tout'—a judgment which would hardly be just if pronounced against Leghorn. Can the writer of this sentence have ever walked up and down the Cannebière? The glory of colour, the splendour of sunshine, the fantastic charm of the stalls and shops opening on the rim of the radiant water, the wonderful multiplicity of many-coloured odds and ends basking and burning in the lazy but imperious light, the infinite interest and amusement excited and supplied by a stroll along that most enchanting of seaside streets, could only have been done into words by Victor Hugo; and all he has to say of it all is this. The only explanation I can conjecture is supplied by the remark of his old friend Nodier fourteen years before: 'Mon cher, vous êtes possédé par le démon Ogive.' And not a word about the island or the castle of If! It is lamentable. However, the admirable contrast drawn between the waves of the Mediterranean and the real waves of the real sea is most happily accurate and appreciative.

Ce n'étaient pas les larges lames de l'Océan qui vont devant elles et qui se déroulent royalement dans l'immensité; c'étaient des houles courtes, brusques, furieuses. L'Océan est à son aise, il tourne autour du monde; la Méditerranée est dans un vase et le vent la secoue, c'est ce qui lui donne cette vague haletante, brève et trapue. [What perfect choice of words, and what exquisite truth of eye!] Le flot se ramasse et lutte. Il a autant de colère que le flot de l'Océan et moins d'espace.

But the transcription of extracts from this book is a temptation to be eschewed. Otherwise the whole account of the double ravine of Ollioules would have to be cited in evidence of the matchless literary power which could make the mere description of a scene unknown to the

reader as enthralling in interest as the most passionate scenes of a story or a play. Yet I suppose that to most readers there must be more interest in the record of a visit to scenes they know and love than in the record of a journey among scenes unfamiliar or undelightful to them ; at all events, I must avow that the second and larger division of this book is to me yet more fascinating than the first part. The style, if I may venture an opinion, is terser, keener, more trenchant and more vivid : the humour is riper and readier than before. Victor Hugo's dislike of what an eminent English poet of a later generation has called ' the happy poplar-land ' may have made him unjust to the capabilities of poplars for exceptional beauty of form and vivacity of expansion under exceptionally happy circumstances ; but before I could say that ' I know a bank ' on which they tower and glitter in such majestic freedom and variety of harmonious form as to rival any growth imaginable, I should certainly have agreed that

le peuplier est le seul arbre qui soit bête. . . . Il y a pour mon esprit je ne sais quel rapport intime, je ne sais quelle ineffable ressemblance, entre un paysage composé de peupliers et une tragédie écrite en vers alexandrins. Le peuplier est, comme l'alexandrin, une des formes classiques de l'ennui.

At Bordeaux the writer of the famous pamphlet headed *Guerre aux Démolisseurs* was moved to utter a protest and a warning as eloquent and as earnest as anything in his two essays on the same subject which were written respectively eighteen and eleven years earlier.

Rien de plus funeste et de plus amoindrisant que les grandes démolitions. Qui démolit sa maison, démolit sa

famille ; qui démolit sa ville, démolit sa patrie ; qui détruit sa demeure, détruit son nom. C'est le vieil honneur qui est dans ces vieilles pierres.

The whole of this letter from Bordeaux should be studied and appreciated by all who feel—and by all who need to learn—how close and how inextricable must be the connection of all serious and serviceable hope for the future with sincere and earnest reverence for the past. This, the key-note of Mazzini's political doctrine, was the watchword of Hugo's æsthetic doctrine long before he had been gradually and naturally led to embrace the republican faith to which, like Shakespeare's Brutus, he devoted his life and his work 'only in a general honest thought, and common good to all.' 'Toutes ces mesures dédaignées,' he continues, 'sont des mesures illustres ; elles parlent, elles ont une voix ; elles attestent ce que vos pères ont fait.'

The description of the ruined cloister could only have been matched in verse by Shelley or in prose by Ruskin ; and for English readers this can hardly but suffice by way of comment or of commendation. In the next letter the journey from Bordeaux to Bayonne is rendered into words of such living simplicity and effect that we hear the sounds and smell the flowers of a summer day now dead these forty-seven years since. The tender childish recollections evoked on entering Bayonne have all the matchless and unfailing charm with which Hugo could always touch and invest, by a natural and sacred magic, the morning lights and shadows of the unforgotten and thenceforward imperishable past. But the charnel-house of St. Michael's at Bordeaux will now be for ever remembered by all students of his work



as the subject of a realistic and tragic poem in prose which may be ranked among the greatest and most terrible triumphs of his imaginative and descriptive genius.

I shall never forget what I saw then. The bell-ringer, silent and motionless, was standing upright in the middle of the crypt, leaning against a post imbedded in the flooring, and with his left hand he was lifting the lamp above his head. I looked round. A misty and scattered light vaguely lit up the crypt : I made out its ogee roof.

Suddenly, fixing my eyes on the wall, I saw that we were not alone.

Strange figures, standing upright with their backs to the wall, surrounded us on all sides. By the light of the lamp I got a confused glimpse of them across the fog which fills low and gloomy vaults.

Imagine a circle of terrifying faces, in the centre of which I was standing. The blackish and naked bodies were sunken and lost in the darkness ; but I saw distinctly, starting out of the shadow, and leaning, as it were, somehow towards me, crowding one against another, a multitude of dismal or dreadful heads, which seemed to call on me with mouths wide open, but voiceless, and gazed on me from eyeless sockets.

What were these figures ? Statues, of course. I took the lamp from the ringer's hands and drew near. They were corpses.

The vampire mob of the Revolution had desecrated the popular cemetery of Bordeaux and the royal cemetery of Saint-Denis at the same infamous instant.

They tore the coffins from the soil ; they flung all that dust to the winds. When the pickaxe came near the foundations of the tower, they were surprised to find no more rotten biers or broken vertebræ, but complete bodies, dried and

preserved by the clay which had covered them during so many years. This inspired the creation of a charnel-house museum. The idea was suitable to the period.

The little children of Montfaucon Street and the road to Bègles were playing at knuckle-down with the scattered fragments of the cemetery. They were taken out of their hands ; all that could be found were collected, and these bones were installed in the lower crypt of the bell-tower of St. Michael's. They made a pile seventeen feet deep, over which a flooring with a balustrade was adjusted. They crowned the whole with the corpses—so strangely intact—which had just been un-earthed. There were seventy of them. They were set upright against the wall in the circular space reserved between the wall and the balustrade. This flooring it was that rang under my feet ; over these bone-heaps I was walking ; those corpses were looking at me.

But something of grimness was yet wanting to this grim show. The plump, comfortable, red-cheeked bell-ringer began to play the part of showman.

' Look at this fellow, sir ; he's number one. He's got all his teeth.—See how well preserved number two is ; and yet he's nearly four hundred years old.—As for number three, one would say he was alive and could hear us. No wonder ; he has only been sixty years dead. He's one of the youngest inhabitants. I know people in the town who knew him.'

If, as some thinkers or dreamers might venture to hope, those two great poets of the grave, John Webster and Victor Hugo, have now met in a world beyond the grave, they must surely have compared notes as to the impression left on such minds as theirs by such experiences as these.

The meditation which follows will remind all readers of one among the greatest poems of the greatest poet

born in our century—*Plours dans la Nuit*. The deep and poignant sense of the apparent horror, the seeming dreadfulness and hopelessness of death, the fierce derision and the bitter mockery of its aspect—‘cette figure désespérée et redoutable’—is not more intensely expressed or more triumphantly subdued by the fervent contemplation of faith and the steadfast exaltation of hope in the poem which was given us thirty-four years ago than in the pages written eleven years before the date of its production and thirteen years before the date of its publication.

Two points in the letter from Biarritz were to me, on a first reading, the dominant points of interest. By far the more interesting of the two—and in all this magnificent volume there is nothing of more interest—is this :—

The second day I went to Biarritz. As I was walking at low tide in among the grotts, looking for shells and terrifying the crabs that ran off sideways and buried themselves in the sand, I heard a voice rising from behind a rock and singing the following stanza with something of a country accent, but not enough to prevent me from distinguishing the words :

‘Gastibelza, l’homme à la carabine,  
Chantait ainsi :  
Quelqu’un a-t-il connu doña Sabine ?  
Quelqu’un d’ici ?  
Dansez, chantez, villageois ! la nuit gagne  
Le mont Falou.  
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne  
Me rendra fou.’

It was a woman’s voice. I went round the rock. The singer was bathing. A handsome girl, who was swimming, clothed with a white shift and a short petticoat, in a little creek shut

in by two reefs at the opening of a grot. Her clothes—a peasant girl's—were lying on the sand at the inner end of the grot. When she saw me, she rose half out of the water and began singing her second stanza, and, seeing that I was standing motionless on the rock listening to her, she said to me, smiling, in a jargon of mixed French and Spanish :

‘Señor estrangero, does your honour know this song?’

‘I think so,’ I answered. ‘A little.’

That the song of songs, which is Hugo's—the one lyric tragedy of passion which will always remain as incomparable and unapproachable as the supreme dramatic tragedy of passion, *Othello*—should have been the poem chosen by chance for the singer to overhear after such a fashion as this seems almost too delightful—too comfortable and satisfactory—to believe. The reader may remember, though he may be unable to count or to conjecture, how often he has chanted or shouted or otherwise declaimed it to himself, on horseback at full gallop or when swimming at his best, as a boy in holiday time; how often the matchless music, the matchless ardour, the matchless pathos of it have reduced his own ambition to a sort of rapturous and adoring despair; and how, supposing him not to be a cur, the sense of its unequalled and unapproachable beauty has requickened his old delight in it with a new delight in the sense that he will always have this to rejoice in, to adore, and to recognize as something beyond reach of man; that, whatever he may achieve, he can never feel himself bereft of a superior, a master, a poet beyond all thought of emulation; that for any one born in this century who dreams of being a lyrist or a dramatist there is always Victor Hugo, living or dead, to look up to and bow down to.

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And that our master should have had the pleasure of this experience—he did not condescend to express his pleasure, but to me his reticence seems hardly to conceal it—must surely be pleasant for all who honour him to remember.

We will not dwell on his shrinking anticipation that Biarritz might some day possibly become fashionable and be ruined ; but the story of his fly could only have been told by Thackeray with such quiet and serious humour. There is nothing funnier in *The Irish Sketch-Book* ; and there certainly is nothing so ingenious or so rascally recorded of an Irish conductor in that kindly and delightful volume. A penny to go, ten shillings to return, make up a tariff worthy of commemoration even by such a passenger as the one who found himself swindled on this occasion ; and Sterne could not have registered the experience with more delightful good-humour and more kindly realism. The fatality which befel everybody present at the first Bonaparte's imperial display or puppet-show would be hardly interesting at this date to any reader if he were not roused and shocked by the statement that 'the captain who had given the empress his hand,' to help her out of the water into which she had stumbled, was afterwards condemned to death, and shot, for having done so. If this be true, it proves—and it is hard to understand how Victor Hugo should not have seen—that France was then at least, whether she is or is not now, so far behind all other barbarous nations as to be fit for alliance with none but Russia, Dahomey, or United Ireland.

The incident of the little old Spanish wagon drawn by oxen, which reminded Hugo of his childhood, will remind all readers of his unequalled power in evoking,

his incomparable tact in expressing, those early recollections and associations which so few men of genius have been able to record gracefully or worthily of themselves. Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo could do this; but I hardly remember another who could. From Bayonne to St. Sebastian the most amusingly memorable record set down by Victor Hugo is the anecdote of a porter, Oyarbide by name. The letter from St. Sebastian leaves the reader bewildered and compassionate at the thought of so many fruitless revolutions, in which so much noble devotion and courage and chivalry were wasted; but the shining instance of royal gratitude on the part of Don Carlos and the noble incident of loyal comradeship on the part of General Elio serve excellently well to set off each other.

The letter describing the strange, enchanted, and enchanting old town of Pasages is so delightfully full of life and light and colour that no commentary can convey or can suggest a sense of its charm. The rival clamours of the boatwomen, which startled the writer from meditation on an insect and a flower; the singularly flattering disappointment of the girl whom Hugo paid for a task on which he did not employ her; the conversation with the admirer of the incomparable rope-walk (Flaubert could not have recorded it with more calm severity and precision of touch); the dazzling and many-coloured prospect of a 'humble corner of earth and water which would be admired if it were in Switzerland and famous if it were in Italy, and is unknown because it is in Guipuzcoa,' compose an inimitable prologue to the extraordinary scene which follows. But I shall not attempt to indicate or to select any special passages or salient

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points in the two letters which give an account of this wonderful town of contrasts and its almost more wonderful surroundings. Let it suffice to say that they would suffice for the fame of a great writer.

The visit after sunset to the wasted village of Leso is told in words which recall and emulate Callot's study of the ravages of war. The grim church, with its ghastly past of sainted inquisitors and its ghastly present of scoffing children, is far more terrible to read of than the devil-haunted ruin on the mountain adjoining.

Pamplona, which the poet had so grandly celebrated fifteen years earlier, inspired on this occasion the longest and one of the most interesting of his letters. The noble, pathetic, and manly meditation on the mysterious sufferings of misused animals should remind us of a passage dealing with the same sorrowful and shameful subject in a poem (*Melancholia*) belonging to the third book of the *Contemplations*. The brilliant and grotesque description of the strange conveyance and its stranger conductors which introduces this discourse on the duty of pity is in its way as perfect as the sublimely characteristic and fantastic sketch of sunrise, touched and coloured by the dream or vision of a suggested sense in awakening nature of pain ineffable and pity inexpressible for the poor tormented and terrified and bewildered beasts of burden or of draught—'those forsaken and miserable animals who are her children as we are, and live nearer to her than we do.'

The summary of Spanish eccentricities and incongruities in which the poet has condensed his impressions of the country he was revisiting—'pays unique où l'incompatible se marie à tout moment, à tout bout de

champ, à tout coin de rue'—is one of the brightest and wittiest in illustration that he ever wrote. The gorge of Tolosa, on the other hand, gives occasion for some of the gravest and loftiest writing in this volume. The savage splendour of cliff and forest, the 'broad sheets of live rock coming down from the highest summits, all sown with almost inexplicable great oaks'; the reapers of the size of ants 'reaping their wheat in the abyss'; the hairbreadth escape of the coach with all its charge, preserved at the edge of the precipice by a decrepit old beggar with a stone kicked under the wheel; the city of Pamplona with its partially defaced cathedral, its quaint or noble incidents of street architecture, the cloister garden and the boudoir sacristy, the battle sculptured in marble on a tomb and the humble bier hard by it; the landscape transfigured by moonrise; the wrinkled and gleaming river that slid among the trees like a silver snake; the outbreak of life and music that brightens the sleepy old city from sunset to midnight; all this, and more, lives and vibrates on the written page as it might in the memory of a witness.

The little adventure recorded in the next letter is told in the illustrious traveller's lightest and brightest style of narrative; and by the help of the plan marking out the various divisions of his night's lodging we can almost see, and for that matter we can almost smell it: the sweet hay and the resinous flame, as well as 'that dull sugary smell exhaled from all Spanish bothies'; the huge fireplace with its dragon-like dogs, the one window, the one bed, the 'stable' with poultry and a calf in it just opposite, the 'cellar,' the 'arsenal,' the huge sloping block of granite with trusses of straw spread

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in front of it by way of accommodation for sleepers in the 'guest-chamber,' the gnome-like ape of a child, the streamlet running down a hollow bole sunk in the ground from one gap in the wall to another : a perfect and memorable picture in its grotesque and homely way.

To the letter from Cauterets the lovers of that sublimely lovely valley will naturally be tempted to turn on first opening this volume ; and it will be with a shock of disappointed amazement that they will find no mention of its crowning glory. Of all great poets that ever lived, with the one possible and doubtful exception of Dante, Victor Hugo is the one who would have seemed most fit to describe and most capable of describing the lake of Gaube ; and he, of all men and all tourists, was the one to turn back down the half-ascended valley, and leave it unvisited. The description of the mountain landscape before dawn is noble and lifelike, touched with earnest thought and coloured by living fancy ; but I for one had hoped to find some notice of the flora and fauna which combine to give this high borderland its peculiar charm of brilliant and fervent life. The fiery exuberance of flowers among which the salamanders glide like creeping flames, radiant and vivid, up to the very skirt of the tragic little pine wood at whose heart the fathomless little lake lies silent, with a dark dull gleam on it as of half-tarnished steel ; the deliciously keen and exquisite shock of a first plunge under its tempting and threatening surface, more icy cold in spring than the sea in winter ; the ineffable and breathless purity of the clasping water in which it seems to savour of intrusive and profane daring that a swimmer should take his pleasure till warned back by fear of cramp when but halfway across

the length of it, and doubtful whether his stock of warmth would hold out for a return from the far edge opposite, to which no favouring magic can be expected to transport the clothes left behind him on the bank off which he dived ; the sport of catching and taming a salamander till it became the pleasantest as well as the quaintest of dumb four-footed friends ; the beauty of its purple-black coat of scaled armour inlaid with patches of dead-leaf gold, its shining eyes and its flashing tongue—these things, of which a humbler hand could write at greater length than this, would require such a hand as Hugo's to do them any sort of justice.

The account of Gavarnie, 'nature's Colosseum,' may be matched against any of this great artist's studies for terse and vigorous precision of imaginative outline. The brief notice of Luz gives a last touch of brightness to a book which then closes in gloom as deep as death. In the isle of Oléron, a ghastly and hardly accessible wilderness of salt marshes, with interludes of sterile meadow and unprofitable vineyard, manured with seaweed and yielding an oily and bitter wine ; with foul grey fog rising in heavy reek from the marshlands, a shore of mud, a desolate horizon, a lean and fever-stricken population, a prison for some hundreds of military convicts ; a heaviness like death, he tells us, fell upon the visitor.

Not a sound to seaward, not a sail, not a bird. At the bottom of the sky, to westward, appeared a huge round moon which seemed in those livid mists the reddened imprint of the moon with its gilding rubbed off. . . . Perhaps on another day, at another hour, I should have had another impression. But

for me that evening everything was funereal and melancholy. It seemed to me that this island was a great coffin lying in the sea, and this moon the torch to light it.

Next day the writer of these words came by chance on the tidings—in a newspaper taken up in a coffee-house—that just five days earlier his eldest daughter and her six-months' husband had been drowned in a boating excursion on the Seine.

It was not till three years later that the first was written of those matchless poems of mourning which keep fresh for ever the record of his crowning sorrow.

## VI.

*NOTES OF TRAVEL.*

## FRANCE AND BELGIUM

1892.

AT the opening of the noble historic drama which secured at once and for ever an unique place among the names of his contemporaries for the name of Sir Henry Taylor, there is a fine passage which seems not more descriptive of the character already displayed and the career already accomplished than prophetic of the career and the character to be for half a century longer even more wonderfully and triumphantly accomplished and displayed by the greatest and the most illustrious of them all.

He was a man of that unsleeping spirit,  
He seemed to live by miracle.

The relaxations accorded by Victor Hugo to his genius in its more inactive hours might have sufficed for the most strenuous exercise, the most ardent application of another man's. Each fresh instalment of his travelling notes and correspondence during any fresh excursion at home or abroad gives new, delightful, and superfluous evidence of this. The tender and cordial simplicity of affection which overflows on every page of the letters addressed to his wife is equally devoid of ostentation and

of reserve. But even in its homeliest and most familiar moments we must recognize the personality, the unity, the harmony of his intelligence. What has been said of Lamb's and of Landor's very briefest and slightest notes may as truthfully be said of Hugo's ; that obviously and unquestionably no other man could have written them, and that they can all with equal ease be distinguished from any other man's. No three good styles could well be more unlike, as no three noble natures could well have shown more points of difference to relieve their fundamental and radical unity of kinship in the crowning qualities of integrity, loyalty, and affection. The soft radiance and beneficence of Lamb's incomparable and inexhaustible humour, the potent and trenchant purity of Landor's matchless steel, are not more unmistakable in every touch and thrust than the lambent fire and the penetrative light of Victor Hugo's impassioned and indefatigable inspiration.

The second instalment posthumously published of his travelling notes consists of letters and journals bearing date from the thirty-third to the thirty-eighth year of his life. At the very outset we recognize the fiery devotion to all that was beautiful, noble, venerable in the past, which informs as with a passion of reverence every line ever written on the many-sided subject of its monuments by the great crusader against modern barbarism whose crowning appeal to his countrymen on behalf of their ravaged and desecrated inheritance was delivered in the famous pamphlet, *Guerre aux Démolisseurs !* The ruined wonders of Karnac gave him 'almost a moment of despair.' The wreck of 'an unique thing which is no more' wrung from his indignation a cry

of natural and noble anguish. This we might have expected : the gift of comic improvisation in ' rime doggerel ' so joyously and brilliantly displayed is only not quite a new revelation of Hugo's universal power of touch upon the lowest as the highest keys, the lightest as the deepest chords of song. Burns himself was no greater master of spontaneous grotesque and the vivid stroke of lyric epigram. The horrible inn of *la Hure* at Laon is immortal as any kirk or hostelry ever consecrated or desecrated by the earlier poet's commemoration : and the odelet (as Banville might have called it) to Yvetot is even beyond such comparison for its play of rhythmic laughter and musical disgust—a bright angry little fountain of sunny mockery spurting up and splashing the unlovely and unlucky little town

Où le poing d'un béliâtre  
 Croit casser une vitre  
 Et crève un vieux papier :  
 Où l'on a pour salade  
 Ce qu'un lapin malade  
 Laisse dans son clapier.

Turn a leaf backwards or forwards, and you come upon some such living and deathless landscape or study of the sea as that of the Tréport moonrise over the rising tide.

Few of the innumerable passages which bear eloquent and passionate record of the poet's devotion to the glories of sacred architecture are nobler or more luminous than his reflections on the cathedral of Chartres.

Autant de détails que dans une forêt, autant de tranquillité et de grandeur. Cet art-là est vraiment fils de la nature. Infini comme elle dans le grand et dans le petit. Microscopique et gigantesque.

O pauvres architectes de nos jours qui ont l'art de faire de si petits édifices avec de si grands amas de pierre, qu'ils viennent donc étudier ceci ! qu'ils viennent apprendre, ces bâtisseurs de grandes murailles nues, comment le simple contient le multiple sans en être troublé, comment le petit détail agrandit le grand ensemble. Ce sont véritablement de malheureux artistes qui ont perdu le sens de leur art, et qui ôteraient les feuilles aux chênes comme les arabesques aux cathédrales.

If no beauty was too delicate, no grace too minute for reproduction by great artists of old and admiration by the greatest of our own age, neither was any detail too mean that had about it any quaint relief or original outline for notice at his hand, and preservation by some touch worthy now of Callot's and now of Hogarth's. Here, in one word, is the physiognomy of a mannish old hag set down for ever.

Ernée est une affreuse petite ville bête et plate où il y a une vieillarde hideuse qui tient une horrible auberge.

The fine and keen sense which registered in its memory the 'wild-beast smell' of a hemlock-field must have suffered martyrdom in a country where—as he affirms of Brittany—the only cleanly inhabitants are the pigs: and even this exception is cancelled, this compliment is withdrawn, in the very next letter: which gives us a glimpse of a cottage gilded with sunshine, smoking gaily through clusters of ivy and roses —'un affreux bouge breton où les cochons couchent pêle-mêle avec les bretons. Il faut avouer que les cochons sont bien sales.' He should have remembered that they were of Celtic breed.

Some of his most thankful and devoted students

have sometimes been somewhat inclined to grudge if not to cavil at the occasional enthusiasm professed or confessed by Victor Hugo for the mechanical triumphs of material progress—for the steamship, for the railway, for the crafts that plague mankind. They will take some little or it may be no little comfort from such a passage as this which places on record his crowning disgust at the crowning degradation and deformation of St. Michael's Mount in Brittany.

Pour couronner le tout, au faite de la pyramide, à la place où resplendissait la statue colossale dorée de l'archange on voit *se tourmenter* quatre bâtons noirs. C'est le télégraphe. Là où s'était posée une pensée du ciel, le misérable tortillement des affaires de ce monde. C'est triste.

The like disgust was aroused at Avranches by the re-appearance of the same incomparably disgusting object. Neither Mr. Ruskin nor Mr. Arnold could have touched a happier note of hatred and contempt for it.

Il y a une magnifique vue, mais il n'y a que cela. Autrefois il y avait trois clochers, maintenant il y a trois télégraphes qui se content réciproquement leurs commérages. Or, les bavardages d'un télégraphe sont d'un médiocre effet dans le paysage.

Next minute we get—and that again in one word—a perfect impression of a complete and indivisible prospect.

J'ai oublié les contorsions du télégraphe au-dessus de ma tête en regardant l'admirable horizon qui entoure le Mont-Saint-Michel de sa circonférence où la mer se soude à la verdure et la verdure aux grèves.



A fuller if not an even finer example of rapid perception and graphic transcription of natural beauty is this contrast between the roofs of inland and of seaside cottages.

C'est une rencontre bien jolie et bien gracieuse qu'une chaumière au bord du chemin. De ces quelques bottes de paille dont les paysans croient faire un toit, la nature fait un jardin. A peine le vilain a-t-il fini son œuvre triviale que le printemps s'en empare, souffle dessus, y mêle mille graines qu'il a dans son haleine, et en moins d'un mois le toit végété, vit et fleurit. S'il est de paille, comme dans l'intérieur des terres, ce sont de belles végétations jaunes, vertes, rouges, admirablement mêlées pour l'œil. Si c'est au bord de la mer et si le chaume est fait d'ajoncs, comme auprès de Saint-Malo, par exemple, ce sont de magnifiques mousses roses, robustes comme des goëmons, qui caparaçonnent la cabane. Si bien qu'il faut vraiment très peu de temps et un rayon de soleil ou un souffle d'air pour que le misérable gueux ait sur sa tête des jardins suspendus comme Sémiramis.

The fusion of pity and horror into a fiery and burning charity which was yet to find its most consummate utterance in *Les Misérables* is here also manifest in the account of two hapless creatures seen and pitied in passing. The noble seaside and sunset view so nobly and vividly rendered in a few strong touches serves painfully well as setting or background for the more lamentable and terrible of the two sorrowful sights.

The notes of a later tour in Belgium are fuller if not more interesting than those of three previous years on Brittany and Normandy. The third is a delightful letter, describing with equal grace of touch the charm of the quaintest of town belfries at Douai and the miraculous dullness and ugliness of Cambrai. A more

fascinating miracle was the wonderfully carved and wonderfully described pulpit of St. Gudule at Brussels ; and the view from the steeple is given as only one man's eye could have seen and only one man's hand could have recorded it.

At Antwerp the strong imagination of Victor Hugo fell in love—such tricks hath strong imagination—with a steam-engine ; the 'prodigious beast' that 'you hear moaning in its whirlwind of flame and smoke like a harassed horse' ; but not so deeply in love as to forbid his admission that

the iron horse must not be seen ; if you see it, all the poetry is gone. Four hundred years since, if those who invented gun-powder had invented steam, as they well might have done, the iron horse would have been otherwise fashioned and otherwise caparisoned ; the iron horse would have been something alive like a horse and awful like a statue. What a magnificent Chimæra would our fathers have made with what we call the boiler ! Can you imagine that ? Of this boiler they would have made a scaly and monstrous belly, an enormous carapace ; of the chimney tube a smoking horn or a long neck with its gullet full of live embers ; and they would have hidden the wheels under immense fins or great falling wings : the carriages too would have had a hundred fantastic forms, and at evening one would have seen passing near towns sometimes a colossal gargoyle with outspread wings, sometimes a dragon vomiting fire, sometimes an elephant with its trunk raised, panting and roaring ; wild, ardent, reeking, terrible, dragging after them as their prey a hundred other monsters enchained, and crossing the plains with the speed, the noise, and the likeness of a thunderbolt. It would have been great.

But we are a set of worthy tradesmen, very stupid and very proud of our stupidity. We understand neither nature nor art, nor intelligence, nor fancy, nor beauty, and what we do not understand we declare, from the height of our pigmyhood,

to be useless. Well and good ; where our ancestors would have seen life, we see matter. There is a splendid subject for a sculptor in a steam-engine : the tenders were an admirable opportunity for reviving the noble art of metal treated in relief. What does that signify to our coal-heavers? Their machine, such as it is, is even now far above the reach of their lumbering admiration. As for me, when I am given Watt stark naked, I should prefer him dressed by Benvenuto Cellini.

It is again a great relief to find so passionate a French patriot as the greatest of all Frenchmen so capable of such bitter contempt for the democratic theatricals of Gallican geese and gooseherds as was excited in the mind of Victor Hugo at sight of a dried poplar in a village marketplace which was announced to him as 'a tree of the constitution.' This mock tree of sham liberty, 'a wretched dry pole which has to be propped up against the wind,' was in his eyes 'a faithful symbol of so many modern constitutions which belong neither to the past nor to the future nor to the climate' of the soil in which the sapless things have been set up to rot.

Nor is it less comfortable to discover that the most illustrious enemy of capital punishment by law could on occasion give just and devout thanks to Heaven for the infliction of capital punishment by murder on a millionaire who had purchased and demolished a beautiful old cloister, who had sold it 'stone by stone, bit by bit, lead, iron, wood, and brick'; who had 'devastated, ruined, dismantled, robbed, and despoiled' the magnificent abbey of St. Bavon. It does the heart good to read and to repeat internally this imprecation of thanksgiving.

In the same letter there is a most graceful and characteristic parallel between art and nature, a cathedral

and a wood, which must remind all worthy readers of an exquisite poem in the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois*.

The noble study of storm at Ostend is worthy of its place in the long and majestic gallery of this great painter's landscapes. The reader sees and hears the falling whirls of gusty rain, the sobs of the sinking and reviving wind, the gulf of inky blackness in front and underfoot and overhead, the fearful noise coming out of it, the sea of flame that once and again blazed forth in it, outlining sharply with its foam of living fire all the fang-like indentations of a dark and jagged seaboard, the thunder crashing down from cloud to cloud like a house-beam fallen from the roof-tree of the sky down the thousand stories of a gigantic framework.

The tender and delicate study of sea and land taken during a walk of twenty-one miles across the sands to Dunkirk may be set against this storm-piece by way of relief. Its perfect rendering of a peculiar effect is as singularly exquisite as is that effect itself in nature: but if Hugo could translate the sunlight and the sea, I do not presume it possible to translate his version of the idyl improvised by their collaboration.

La mer était parfaitement gaie et calme, et l'écume des vagues, blanche et pailletée au soleil, faisait tout le long du rivage comme une frange de vermicelles et de chicorées cent fois plus délicatement sculptés que tous les plafonds maniérés du dix-huitième siècle. Quand la mer veut faire du rococo, elle y excelle. Les confiseries Pompadour lui ont pillé ses coquillages.

All worshippers of what is most adorable on this earth will appreciate the following pious utterance of a

fellow-believer whose name heads the list of the apostles of their faith, the canonical roll of the hierarchs of their church.

C'est un des côtés charmants du voyage dans cette saison, à la porte de chaque chaumière il y a un enfant. Un enfant debout, couché, accroupi, endimanché, tout nu, lavé ou barbouillé, pétrissant la terre, pataugeant dans la mare, quelquefois riant, quelquefois pleurant, toujours exquis. Je songe parfois avec tristesse que toutes ces délicieuses petites créatures feront un jour d'assez laids paysans. Cela tient à ce que c'est Dieu qui les commence et l'homme qui les achève.

L'autre jour, c'était charmant. Figure-toi cela, chère amie. Il y avait, sur le seuil d'une masure, un petit qui tenait ses deux sabots dans ses deux mains, et me regardait passer avec de beaux grands yeux étonnés. Tout à côté il y en avait une autre, une petite fille grande comme Dédé, qui portait dans ses bras un gros garçon de dix-huit mois, lequel serrait dans les siens une poupée. Trois étages. En tout, trente-deux pouces de haut.

And there they are for ever ; immortal as nature could not make them ; never to grow older or bigger or less—to borrow an apt epithet from Sir Philip Sidney—less kissworthy.

Among many that might be chosen I select as a faultless and complete example of style this vignette of a seaside hamlet.


Étaples n'est qu'un village, mais un village comme je le cherche, une colonie de pêcheurs installée dans un des plus gracieux petits golfes de la Manche. La marée était basse quand j'y suis arrivé ; toutes les barques étaient échouées au loin sur le sable, noires et luisantes comme des coquilles de moules. J'en ai dessiné quelques-unes, tout en me promenant sur la grève. De temps en temps je rencontrais, sur les seuils des cabanes, de graves figures de marins qui vous saluent noble-

ment. La mer brillait au milieu du golfe, éclatante et déchiquetée, comme un lambeau de drap d'argent. Les hauteurs qui bornent l'horizon au midi ont une forme magnifique et calme. Quelques grands nuages y rôdaient lentement. C'était un spectacle tranquille et grand.

Le soir, il semble que les nuages vont se coucher. Ils s'aplatissent, ils s'allongent, ils s'étendent comme pour dormir.

Le jour ils s'enflent, se dilatent et se gonflent au soleil comme des édreons devant le feu. En général, je les aime mieux le soir. Ils dessinent alors dans l'air des baies et des promontoires qui font du ciel un immense miroir où la mer se réfléchirait avec ses côtes sombres et découpées.

At Montreuil-sur-Mer, a place not yet made famous and wellnigh sacred by the memories of Jean Valjean and Fantine, the future author of *Les Misérables* mused only on those aspects and developments of inanimate and animated nature through plant and stone and beast which were to inspire so much of his subtlest and sublimest poetry, and here gave birth and form to a simple and noble rapture of meditation. Next moment we come upon a curious example of the quality known as 'jingoism' in the gutter slang of those reactionary disunionists whose version of a vulgar song would seem to run as follows :—

We don't want to  but if you, by jingo ! do,  
Pray take our money, ships, and men—but please don't  
kick us too.

The blindest and spitefullest childishness of poor old Citizen Chauvin is respectable compared to the grovelling abjection of Anglo-Saxon Anglophobia. Even among the basest of French reactionaries the French might be justified in boasting that such naked and shameless disloyalty would be scouted and scourged back into its

sewer-holes. It is a less ignoble perversity or obliquity of prepossession which sees in the victory of Waterloo 'the triumph of mediocrity over genius.' At this we may smile: our gorge rises at the other.

The humorous little word of unapologetic apology—of apology in the original sense of vindication—with which Victor Hugo dismisses the intrusive and irritating subject is delightful in its frank and manly good-nature of tone. 'Je n'ignore pas que tout ce que j'écris ici pourrait se traduire en un couplet de facture' [I must take leave to add, with all deference, that it most certainly might], 'mais cela m'est égal. Albertus' [Gautier, I presume, the young author of the splendid youthful poem so entitled] 'sait bien que j'ai tout un grand côté bête et patriote'—for which no loyal and patriotic Englishman will love or honour him one jot or tittle the less.

There is a superb and all but Rabelaisian description of the huge farmyard in a little hamlet where the stage-coaches used still, in those days, to cross and halt:—

Sans songer à la table d'hôte, ce monstre aux dents de requin, toutes ces omelettes, toutes ces côtelettes, tous ces jambons, tous ces salmis, grouillent, piaillent, bêlent, chantent, roucoulent, grognent, volent, marchent, nagent, et flânent parmi des Alpes de fumier où les mares font des lacs.

Here follows a noble description of a noble sow:—

Elle est monstrueuse, elle est gaie, grasse, velue, rose et blonde. Il faut être un fier cochon pour faire la cour à une pareille créature.

In the next letter there is an admirably faithful description of the effect seen from a cliff where the landscape at its highest seems overtopped by the outer sea.

A few more vivid sketches of the seaboard towns and villages, cliffs and downs, bring the epistolary journal of 1837 to a graceful close with the picture of a vagrant family which might have been taken by another and younger great writer whose genius was then at sunrise—Dickens.

The notes of a two years' later excursion in the south of France and Burgundy belong, it seems, to the same series from which the author's famous book on the Rhine was long since compiled for publication, and of which the first posthumous volume of travelling notes gave another and not yet a final instalment. The appropriate aspect of Avignon under an autumnal sunset is briefly and brightly translated into words, with the natural commentary on its historical and spiritual significance.

All lovers of his second masterpiece in prose will turn with interest deeper than any mere eagerness of curiosity to the record of Victor Hugo's visit to the galleys at Toulon. In the next letter they will be refreshed by a magnificent mountain and sea-side landscape of precipice and forest bathed and steeped in magical flying glories of storm and sunrise; in the next by a noble rapid sketch of the Rhone in flood.

The last section of this beautiful and precious volume is consecrated to the cathedral of Sens. Full of learning, eloquence, personal and historical interest, it closes with an elegiac epitaph on the grave of a little unknown child. The four lovely lines have appeared before in an earlier volume of these priceless and deathless posthumous works: they could nowhere be more perfectly in place, more happily in character, than here.



## VII.

## 'DIEU.'

1891.

TOWARDS the close of the year 1855 two poems by Victor Hugo were announced for publication: an engagement never to be fully redeemed, and never to be redeemed at all during the lifetime of their author. Upwards of thirty years more were reserved for the various and incessant labours of his illustrious life, for the manifold and marvellous expansion of his incomparable genius; but the two poems advertised as then in preparation were never to appear in full. On the reverse leaf of the plain paper covering in which *Les Contemplations* then came forth for the delight and wonder of all ages of the world, till thought and passion, sympathy and emotion, and poetry and nature shall be no more, the two great and strange titles, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, gave promise of future work on the same lines as the sixth book of that immortal collection or selection of lyric and elegiac, meditative and prophetic poetry. And now, upwards of thirty-six years later, we receive all that we ever shall receive of the first-named and more ambitious poem. Fragments of its vast original design may possibly be recognized, may certainly be surmised, as lying imbedded or incorporate in other works since

completed and issued in the designer's lifetime ; in the second series, for instance, of *La Légende des Siècles*, and especially in the historic and philosophic poem called *Religious et Religion*. There as here the intellect of a sovereign thinker was rather displayed than disguised by the genius of a supreme poet. We must not, of course, overlook or forget a fact so familiar to the lowest intelligence which finds itself capable of articulate expression as is this : that no great poet can be really a great thinker ; that the ideal Gomorrah of Plato was the creation of a deeper intelligence, a loftier intuition, than the ideal Arcopagus of Æschylus ; that Aristophanes of Athens, in his campaign against Socrates of Sodom, succeeded only in displaying the spiritual inferiority of a conservative patriot to a progressive idealist. A later and no less obvious example of intellectual inferiority—of petty, trivial, fantastic tenuity of thought, contrasted with superb, virile, trenchant energy of intelligence—must be familiar to all Englishmen who have ever compared Shakespeare's plays with Bacon's essays : the platitudes, for instance, of the playwright's Hamlet with the profundities of the Chancellor's exposition 'of Nature in Men.'

With Plato and Bacon we must not then compare—we should not, if desirous to do so, be permitted to compare—such thoughtless thinkers, such brainless songsters, as Sophocles or Shakespeare, Pindar or Victor Hugo. We must know that we must be wrong if we fancy that we find in such a volume as that now before us more grasp of thought, more solidity of reason, more fixity of faith, than in such theological treatises as teach us the grammar of assent without belief. It must suffice us to

examine, in a spirit of charitable tolerance and of consideration less contemptuous than compassionate, what manner of message, if any, it may pretend or attempt to convey.

One point, however, it would be difficult for the most scornful professor of theology or atheology to dispute ; that the most ardent optimist and spiritualist of his age could become, when it pleased him to speak dramatically, to cast his imagination, as it were, into the mould of another man's mind, and assume the mask or the raiment of another man's intelligence, an incomparable exponent of pessimism and materialism. The philosopher of Force and Matter, the poet of Dreadful Night, found no such utterance for the faith which was in them as Hugo has bestowed upon the bat and the owl of his superhuman vision.

Le moindre grain de sable est un globe qui roule  
 Traînant comme la terre une lugubre foule  
 Qui s'abhorre, et s'acharne, et s'exècre, et sans fin  
 Se dévore ; la haine est au fond de la faim.  
 La sphère imperceptible à la grande est pareille ;  
 Et le songeur entend, quand il penche l'oreille,  
 Une rage tigresse et des cris léonins  
 Rugir profondément dans ces univers nains.

In no other poem of Hugo's are there to be found so many and such striking coincidences of thought and expression with the contemporary work of his greatest English contemporary. Compare with this the famous passage in *Maud*—

For nature is one with rapine.

Again and again the English reader will be reminded of Tennyson as vividly and as directly as here. It is hardly

necessary to transcribe any of the parallel passages which no probable reader can be supposed not to know by heart.

Tout ce que vous voyez est larve ; tout vous leurre,  
Et tout rapidement fond dans l'ombre ; car tout  
Tremble dans le mystère immense et se dissout ;  
La nuit reprend le spectre ainsi que l'eau la neige.  
La voix s'éteint avant d'avoir crié : Que sais-je ?

\* \* \* \* \*

O toi qui vas ! l'esprit, le vent, la feuille morte,  
Le silence, le bruit, cette aile qui t'emporte,  
Le jour que tu crois voir par moments, ce qui luit,  
Ce qui tremble, le ciel, l'être, tout est la nuit !

To this cry of triumphant despair it would be difficult to find an echo in the work of the English poet ; but all serious lovers of poetry will be reminded of one of the noblest passages in English verse on reading these posthumous lines of the greatest European poet since the days of Dante.

Vanté !

Tu crois qu'en te créant Dieu t'a mis de côté,  
Que ton berceau contient toutes les origines,  
Et que tout se condense en toi ; tu t'imagines  
Qu'à mesure que tout naissait et surgissait  
L'Éternel t'en donnait quelque chose ; et que c'est  
Sur ton crâne que Dieu pensif traça l'épure  
De ce monde qu'emplit son auréole pure.  
Tu dis : J'ai la raison, la vertu, la beauté.  
Tu dis : Dieu fut très las pour m'avoir inventé,  
Et tu crois l'égaliser chaque fois que tu bouges.

'He now is first, but is he the last ? is he not too base ?'  
That bitter and terrible question will ring at once in  
the ears of the English reader ; who can hardly fail to

remember the magnificent music of the six lines which close with it as even greater and more memorable than the ironic harmony, the dramatic resonance, of these.

But it is rather of Blake than of Tennyson that an English reader will be usually reminded by the passionate and apocalyptic utterance of horror and of hope, of anguish and of faith, which rings and thrills through every line of this incomplete yet perfect poem. The intensity of pity and of wonder, hardly harmonized or scarcely subdued by the intensity of hope and faith, which vibrates in the lyric aspiration and meditation of Blake, finds a fuller, a clearer, but not a deeper or a purer expression in the matchless verse of Hugo. The adorable poem called *Auguries of Innocence*—a series of such divine epigrams as angels might be imagined to dictate, by way of a lesson for repetition, to little children—has here, for the first time, an echo or a parallel. The wrongs and sufferings of our fellow-animals had been nobly and touchingly denounced and lamented by such less inspired voices as those of Cowper and of Burns, before they struck home to the heart of the great man who was only not a great poet in the formal and executive sense because he was always altogether a child at heart, and a vagrant denizen on earth of the kingdom of heaven ; but the pleading or the appeal of Burns as of Cowper was merely the expression of material compassion and compassionate indignation ; to Blake as to Hugo these sufferings and these wrongs were the ciphers or the figures of a problem insoluble except by faith, and unendurable to contemplate unless by the eyes of faith. Not Blake himself is more extravagant, excessive, outrageous to the instincts or the in-

ductions of common sense and practical reason—more preposterous, more puerile, more Manichean—than the greatest and most inspired writer of our own day. Till now it would have been difficult to find a parallel for the divine absurdity, the insane and ineffable wisdom, of such sayings as these :—

A robin-redbreast in a cage  
 Puts all Heaven in a rage.  
 A gamecock clipped and armed for fight  
 Doth the rising sun affright.  
 A horse misused upon the road  
 Calls to Heaven for human blood.  
 Each outcry of the hunted hare  
 A fibre from the brain doth tear.  
*A skylark wounded on the wing*  
*Doth make a cherub cease to sing.*

But the passionate pity, the fiery tenderness and the sensitive intensity of faith, with which these couplets are informed and imbued as with life and meaning beyond the mere nakedness of words, are clothed by the genius of Hugo with yet fuller and loftier and more superb expression. And assuredly the vehemence of belief—the wilfulness, the positiveness, the audacity of confidence—is unmistakably identical in its constant and insistent ardour of affirmation. No two poets of the prophetic or evangelic order can ever have had more utterly unlike beginnings and surroundings than the London hosier's son and the child of the camp of the French army in Spain : and yet there is no third—not even Shelley, and not even Coleridge—whose vision was as the vision of these ; right or wrong, mad or sane, wise or foolish. Hugo's, as we know, was to Sainte-Beuve a

stumbling-block, and to Mérimée foolishness ; Blake's, to all but two or three of his contemporaries—Wordsworth, to be sure, being one of the two or three—was sheer lunacy. For less acute and intelligent readers than the Sainte-Beuves and Mérimées and Matthew Arnolds it may be interesting to compare the couplets above cited with the passage of which these few lines may be taken as a sample :—

Pourquoi le héron gris, qui s'enfuit dans les brumes,  
Sent-il le noir faucon fouiller du bec ses plumes ?  
Pourquoi, troussant ta manche et tachant tes habits,  
Plonges-tu les couteaux aux gorges des brebis ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Cours au désert, la vie est-elle plus joyeuse ?  
Que d'effrayants combats dans le creux d'une yeuse  
Entre la guêpe tigre et l'abeille du miel !  
Va-t'en aux lieux profonds, aux rocs voisins du ciel,  
Aux caves des souris, aux ravins à panthères ;  
Regarde ce bloc d'ombre et ce tas de mystères ;  
Fouille l'air, l'onde, l'herbe ; écoute l'affreux bruit  
Des broussailles, le cri des Alpes dans la nuit,  
Le hurlement sans nom des jungles tropicales ;  
Quelle vaste douleur !

It seems unseemly and irreverent to transcribe such lines and to break off in the middle ; but the breach must be made somewhere. And wherever the eye may light on reopening the book, the hand is impelled to transcribe again such samples of its contents as this :—

L'homme n'a qu'à pleurer pour retrouver son père.  
Le malheur lui dit : Crois. La mort lui crie : Espère !  
Qu'il se repente, il tient la clef d'un sort meilleur.  
Dieu lui remplace, après l'épreuve et la douleur,

Le paradis des fleurs par l'éden des étoiles.  
Ève, à ta nudité. Marie offre ses voiles :  
L'ange au glaive de feu rappelle Adam proscrit ;  
L'âme arrive portant la croix de Jésus-Christ ;  
L'éternel près de lui fait asseoir l'immortelle.

Aigle, la sainteté de l'âme humaine est telle  
Qu'au fond du ciel suprême où la clarté sourit,  
Où le Père et le Fils se mêlent dans l'Esprit,  
Il semble que l'azur égalise et confonde  
Jésus, l'âme de l'homme, et Dieu, l'âme du monde !

The adoring reverence of Hugo for the sacred name which is used here to express the ideal of divine or glorified humanity stands out singularly in contrast with the apparent aversion excited by its association with creeds and churches in the mind of such a contemporary student and fellow-republican as Michelet. But it is always more interesting, as it is always more profitable, to find instances of likeness than to find instances of contrast to the work of a poet or the speculation of a thinker : and in the following couplet—one of the most perfect and magnificent in all the world of verse—we hear again an unconscious echo of the spirit and indeed the very voice of William Blake.

L'oubli que ferait Dieu du dernier et du moindre  
Suffirait pour ôter au jour le droit de poindre.

But of course it is seldom that we find anything here which could have been written by any hand save one. The full and fiery torrent of Crashaw's sometimes turbid and morbid verse poured out in honour of a great Catholic saint has in it no pearl of praise that can be set



against the single line which closes the following magnificent and transcendent passage.

Oh ! vous l'avez cherché sans l'entrevoir, sibylles,  
Ce Dieu mystérieux des azurs immobiles !  
Filles des visions, toi, sous l'arche d'un pont,  
Manto ; toi, guettant l'œuf que la chouette pond,  
Albunée, et brûlant une torche de cire ;  
Toi, celle de Phrygie, épouvante d'Ancyre,  
Parlant à l'astre, et, pâle, écoutant s'il répond ;  
Celle d'Imbrasia ; celle de l'Hellespont  
Qui se dresse déesse et qui retombe hyène ;  
Toi, Tiburtine ; et toi, la rauque Libyenne,  
Criant : Treize ! essayant la loi du nombre impair ;  
Toi dont le regard fixe inquiétait Vesper,  
Larve d'Endor ; et toi, les dents blanches d'écume,  
Les deux seins nus, ô folle effrayante de Cume ;  
Chaldéenne, filant un invisible fil ;  
Sardique à l'œil de chèvre, au tragique profil ;  
Toi, maigre et toute nue au soleil, Érythrée,  
D'azur et de lumière et d'horreur pénétrée ;  
Toi, Persique, habitant un sépulcre détruit,  
O face à qui parlaient les passants de la nuit  
Et les échevelés qui se penchent dans l'ombre ;  
Toi, mangeant du cresson dans ta fontaine sombre,  
Delphique ; âpres esprits, toutes, vous eûtes beau  
Hurler, frapper le vent, remuer le tombeau,  
Rouler vos fauves yeux dans la profondeur noire,  
Nulle de vous n'a vu clairement dans sa gloire  
Ce grand Dieu du pardon sur la terre levé.  
Sainte Thérèse, avec un soupir, l'a trouvé.

Victor Hugo alone could have written that ; and Victor Hugo alone could have put into the mouth of an angel such superhuman words as these :—

Si tu ne l'entends pas, tu peux au moins le voir,  
L'hymne éternel, vibrant sous les éternels voiles,  
Les constellations sont des gammes d'étoiles ;  
Et les vents par moments te chantent des lambeaux  
Du chant prodigieux qui remplit les tombeaux.

Of this great new song which comes to us from the grave of Victor Hugo there is so much more to be said than any man could say at once that it may be well to disclaim all pretence of giving an analysis or even a summary of its component parts. Those who would know what it contains and what it conveys—its dramatic force, its philosophic insight, its evangelic passion—must be content and thankful to study it reverently and thoroughly for themselves.

## VIII.

' *TOUTE LA LYRE* '

## I.

1889.

ONE thing may perhaps for once be prophesied without hazard of presumption in attempting to anticipate the verdict of future centuries: that it would be impossible for them to believe in the single authorship of the various works which bear the signature of Victor Hugo, if it were not impossible to believe that any other man could have bequeathed to eternity any one of his masterpieces in verse or prose. But the fact must be faced and admitted that in the fourth instalment of his posthumous works we have received a gift which of itself would suffice to secure for the giver a place among the greatest poets of all nations and all times. From the collection of later and earlier poems which bears the magnificent inscription of *Toute la Lyre* any reader might gather at random such samples as would serve for evidence of this. These are the forty-fourth and forty-fifth volumes of his collected works; but were it possible that they should fall into the hands of a reader unacquainted with any other work of their author's and not incompetent to recognize at sight the evidence of supreme genius, he

would at once acknowledge the presence, the hand, and the voice of one among the crowning writers of the world. The peculiar majesty of melody which no other poet can emulate or imitate—which places the singer as far beyond reach of any mocking-bird as Coleridge or Shakespeare, the two English poets whose note has never been caught, whose cadence has never found an echo except in the heart of the hearer—this unique and magical quality of living music vibrates alike in every form of verse, in each variety of metre, to which the genius or the fancy, the passion or the thought of the musician may choose to incline or adapt itself. No one can mistake and no one can mimic it: it is always Hugo's alone, yet its changes and modulations are infinite. Even when it is used to repeat and reinforce some lesson or some message which it has often conveyed before, there is almost always some fresh note, some new grace of expression, some new fervour of inspiration in the delivery of the preacher if not in the subject-matter of his gospel. It would have seemed impossible that he should have anything new to bequeath us on the subject of the old revolution, Danton, Marat, Charlotte Corday, and all the other names and memories which crowd the splendid and sonorous verses of the opening poem: yet the following couplet on Marat is not an exceptional instance of the fresh and vivid and sublime energy which informs it.

Il agite l'antique et monstrueuse chaîne,<sup>1</sup>  
 Hideux, faisant sonner le fer contre sa haine.

<sup>1</sup> Marat's curious book, *Les Chaînes de l'Esclavage*, can hardly have deserved or obtained an allusion here from the greatest of modern dramatic poets; for in that fierce and laborious impeachment of existing civilization (pp. 62, 63) the rage of the Puritans against the theatre, as an engine of

Nor has the gospel of universal mercy and indiscriminate compassion ever found more simple and succinct expression than in these four weighty and melodious and memorable verses.

Le droit n'a pas besoin de se mettre en fureur,  
Et d'arriver les mains pleines de violences,  
Et de jeter un glaive au plateau des balances.  
Il paraît, on tressaille ; il marche, on dit : C'est Dieu.

But it is not the preacher or the evangelist—earnest and fervent as is the sermon, ardent and sublime as is the apostolate—who commands and retains attention throughout the greater and the better part of this book : it is simply the poet ; the greatest maker and the sweetest singer of his age. Even in the second poem, which places on record a beautiful episode of battle recited by the author's father, there is a clearer note, a fresher air of pure and simple inspiration ; a more direct touch, a more immediate sense, of merely poetic, dramatic, or universal interest.<sup>1</sup> And in the sixteen verses of dialogue between the sheykh and the robber there is matter enough to secure immortality for the writer who could condense so much of what is noblest in human nature into such terse, vivid, straightforward and perfect expression. The effect could not be so fully and so briefly conveyed except in verse : but what other poet could

corruption and an instrument of royalism, finds a vehement and significant echo. Marat, very naturally and properly, cites Prynne in support of their common cause.

<sup>1</sup> The copy before me (second edition) has one of the most monstrous misprints on record in the twenty-eighth line of this poem—'seneur' for 'semoun.' The right reading was given in the *Rappel*, where the text first appeared in print. This incomprehensible and senseless corruption is worthy of a place in the first folio of Shakespeare.

have conveyed it as has this one, of all poets the most inexhaustible and indefatigable in sympathy with all noble emotion and in presentation of all chivalrous loyalty?

Upon this side of his character, upon this phase of his genius, it would be exceptionally superfluous—where all attempts at praise may perhaps be considered superfluous—for a commentator on the posthumous work of Victor Hugo to dwell at any length, or to cite any examples as especially illustrative and significant. In a bird's-eye view of these two hundred poems the glance must needs alight more or less at random on this or that 'particular star' or flower which may not or which may be worthier of notice than any other of the train of spring or the host of heaven. But it may be safely said that they contain nothing more representative, more unattainable by any other man, more unmistakable as the work of no possible hand but their writer's, than the four following stanzas, descriptive and representative of 'rough weather by night.'

Le vent hurle, la rafale  
Sort, ruisselante cavale,  
Du gouffre obscur,  
Et, hennissant sur l'eau bleue,  
Des crins épars de sa queue  
Fouette l'azur.

L'horizon, que l'onde encombre,  
Serpent, au bas du ciel sombre  
Court tortueux ;  
Toute la mer est difforme ;  
L'eau s'emplit d'un bruit énorme  
Et monstrueux.

Le flot vient, s'enfuit, s'approche,  
 Et bondit comme la cloche  
 Dans le clocher,  
 Puis tombe, et bondit encore ;  
 La vague immense et sonore  
 Bat le rocher.

L'océan frappe la terre.  
 Oh ! le forgeron mystère,  
 Au noir manteau,  
 Que forge-t-il dans la brume,  
 Pour battre une telle enclume  
 D'un tel marteau ?

What English poet has translated that peculiar action of the sea as adequately, as superbly, as exactly, as it is rendered in these marvellous verses ? What poet of any time or any nation has put more passionate and vivid imagination into more perfect metaphor with more sublime fidelity ?

The terror of nature, the mystery of apparent and unapparent things, the malign and lurid side of what we see and imagine in the aspects of earth and sky at certain hours or moments, was never rendered by Shelley or by Coleridge into words more pregnant with passionate imagination and contagious awe than these :—

C'est l'heure où le sépulcre appelle la chouette.  
 On voit sur l'horizon l'étrange silhouette  
 D'un bras énorme ayant des courbes de serpent ;  
 On dirait qu'il protège, on dirait qu'il répand  
 On ne sait quel amour terrible dans cette ombre.  
 Est-ce Arimane ?

O ciel, sous les astres sans nombre,  
 Dans l'air, dans la nuée où volent les griffons,  
 Dans le chaos confus des branchages profonds,  
 Dans les prés, dans les monts, dans la grande mer verte,  
 Dans l'immensité bleue aux aurores ouverte,  
 Qu'est-ce donc que l'esprit de haine peut aimer ?  
 Lui, qui veut tout tarir, que fait-il donc germer ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Il semble heureux. Il parle aux choses invisibles ;  
 Il leur parle si bas, si doucement, qu'on peut  
 Entendre le rayon de lune qui se meut  
 Et la vague rumeur des ruches endormies.

The task of selection from such a treasury of jewels as this book is so delicate and so difficult that perhaps the choice of quotations may as well be left to the decision of mere chance. But the student will do well to collate for comparison the various studies after nature gathered together in the second division ; and to note especially among these such flawless little masterpieces of tender meditation or sublime impression as the moon-light landscape which brings before us the world as we see it

Quand la lune apparaît dans la brume des plaines,  
 Quand l'ombre émue a l'air de retrouver la voix,  
 Lorsque le soir emplit de frissons et d'haleines  
 Les pâles ténèbres des bois.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nous nous promènerons dans les campagnes vertes ;  
 Nous pencherons, pleurant ce qui s'évanouit,  
 Nos âmes ici-bas par le malheur ouvertes  
 Sur les fleurs qui s'ouvrent la nuit !

\* \* \* \* \*



La calme et sombre nuit ne fait qu'une prière  
 De toutes les rumeurs de la nuit et du jour ;  
 Nous, de tous les tourments de cette vie amère  
 Nous ne ferons que de l'amour !

The milder melody of such lovely lines as these is relieved by the sterner and more condensed verse, the keener and more sombre imagination of such studies as *The Cloud*. All true lovers of Pyrenean scenery will rejoice to find that the glorious valley of Cauterets has been glorified by Victor Hugo as well as by his most illustrious contemporary fellow-poet. The solemn sweetness of Lord Tennyson's majestic verses is not more memorable or more characteristic than the visionary passion and the contemplative sublimity of Victor Hugo's.

Le matin, les vapeurs, en blanches mousselines,  
 Montent en même temps, à travers les grands bois,  
 De tous les ravins noirs, de toutes les collines,  
 De tous les sommets à la fois.

Un jour douteux ternit l'horizon ; l'aube est pâle ;  
 Le ciel voilé n'a plus l'azur que nous aimons,  
 Tant une brume épaisse à longs flocons s'exhale  
 Des flancs monstrueux des vieux monts !

On croit les voir bondir comme au temps du prophète,  
 Et l'on se dit, de crainte et de stupeur saisi :  
 —O chevaux monstrueux ! quelle course ont-ils faite  
 Que leurs croupes fument ainsi !

Compare with that southern landscape this northern vision of the sea.

Quand la profonde nuit fait de l'ombre une geôle,  
 Quand la vague, roulant d'un pôle à l'autre pôle,  
     Se creuse en ténébreux vallons,  
 Quand la mer monstrueuse et pleine de huées  
 Regarde en frissonnant voler dans les nuées  
     Les sombres aigles aquilons ;

Ou, plus tard, quand le jour, vague ébauche, commence . . .  
 O plaine qui frémit ! bruit du matin immense !  
     Tout est morne et lugubre encor ;  
 L'horizon noir paraît plein des douleurs divines ;  
 Le cercle des monts fait la couronne d'épines,  
     L'aube fait l'auréole d'or !

Moi, pendant que tout rêve à ces spectacles sombres,  
 Soit que la nuit, pareille aux temples en décombres,  
     Obscurcisse l'azur bruni,  
 Soit que l'aube apparue au front des cieux sincères  
 Farouche et toute en pleurs, semble sur nos misères  
     L'œil effaré de l'infini ;

Je songe au bord des eaux, triste ;—alors les pensées  
 Qui sortent de la mer, d'un vent confus poussées,  
     Filles de l'onde, essaim fuyant,  
 Que l'âpre écume apporte à travers ses fumées,  
 M'entourent en silence, et de leurs mains palmées  
     M'entrouvrent le livre effrayant.

But it is not the darker side of nature which most attracts the imaginative sympathy of the great poet who could translate it into such accurate and tragic harmony of lyrical expression. The comfort and refreshment and reassurance of natural beauty can never have been more deeply felt or more thankfully acknowledged than by the writer of these lines :—

Là, rien ne s'interrompt, rien ne finit d'éclore ;  
 Le rosier respiré par Ève embaume encore  
     Nos deuils et nos amours ;  
 Et la pervenche est plus éternelle que Rome ;  
 Car ce qui dure peu, monts et forêts, c'est l'homme ;  
     Les fleurs durent toujours.

Not only the beauty and the mystery of nature but her ugliness and dulness have afforded occasion to great painters for great pictures ; and even such a masterpiece as that marvellous work of Rubens which sets before us the ghastly and haggard horror of the deadly and sultry landscape in which the Escorial is set like a death's-head in a ring is no finer example of the beauty which art may succeed in evoking or evolving out of ugly nature than such a poem as that which describes the mean and sullen country where a smoky little hamlet may be seen on the far horizon,

Le paysage étant plat comme Mérimée.

That final stroke of sudden sarcasm on the courtly cynic who so long outlived the glittering and unfruitful promise of his youth may be compared with a similar touch at the close of the poem just quoted, in which the returned exile summons his children and his friends to the fields and woods where they need no longer know or care if Parliament is sitting and trifling at Versailles or at Saint-Cloud,

Et si le pape enfin daigne rougir la jupe  
 Du prêtre dont le nom commence comme dupe  
     Et finit comme loup.

Such passing shafts of satire show a happier hand and

a truer aim than some of the 'swashing blows' delivered in the eighth or supplementary section of this book. But none of Hugo's personal reflections or retorts seem to me quite as good and quite as happy as the ever-memorable description or definition of Sainte-Beuve—'homme distingué et inférior, ayant l'envie pardonnable à la laideur.'<sup>1</sup> The late Mgr. Dupanloup, I presume, has hardly so many admirers in England that it might be necessary to indicate the justice of the sarcasm applied to him: but the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, who cannot in charity or in reason be supposed to have known much more of the man's character than he knew of French poetry or Irish politics, has lavished so much praise on that incarnation of envy that the temperate and sparing phrase by which Hugo has made the back-biter's name immortal may probably give some surprise if not some offence to English admirers—at second-hand—of the versatile and venomous rhetorician who wrote, as well as his *Causeries de Lundi*, a certain furtive series of anonymous articles republished since his death under the title of *Chroniques Parisiennes*. The man who has not read these has but an imperfect conception of the meaning of the terms malignity and meanness, platitude and perversity, decrepitude of cankered intelligence and desperation of universal rancour.<sup>2</sup>

But the bitterness of scorn and the fervour of indignation which animate the strictures of a great poet on such literary or political underlings as these might serve

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire d'un Crime*, iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> I may add that Mr. Arnold himself, even when writing on Shelley or on Burns, hardly showed such depth of incompetence combined with such shallowness of apprehension as Sainte-Beuve when writing on Villon.

—if that were needful—to give the measure of his tenderness and his devotion when dealing with things sacred and divine. That this book should contain verses worthy of a place in *L'Art d'être Grand-père* proves at once that their subject is inexhaustible and that the genius of its chosen poet-laureate was as inexhaustible as the fascination of infancy itself.

Il vit à peine ; il est si chétif qu'il réclame  
 Du brin d'herbe ondoyant aux vents un point d'appui.  
 Parfois, lorsqu'il se tait, on le croit presque enfui,  
 Car on a peur que tout ici-bas ne le blesse.  
 Lui, que fait-il ? Il rit. Fait d'ombre et de faiblesse  
 Et de tout ce qui tremble, il ne craint rien. Il est  
 Parmi nous le seul être encore vierge et complet ;  
 L'ange devient enfant lorsqu'il se rapetisse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Toutes les vérités couronnent condensées  
 Ce doux front qui n'a pas encore de pensées ;  
 On comprend que l'enfance, ange de nos douleurs,  
 Si petit ici-bas, doit être grand ailleurs.  
 Il se traîne, il trébuche ; il n'a dans l'attitude,  
 Dans la voix, dans le geste aucune certitude ;  
 Un souffle à qui la fleur résiste fait ployer  
 Cet être à qui fait peur le grillon du foyer ;  
 L'œil hésite pendant que la lèvre bégaye ;  
 Dans ce naïf regard que l'ignorance égaie  
 L'étonnement avec la grâce se confond,  
 Et l'immense lueur étoilée est au fond.

The three following 'children's epitaphs' combine the perfect grace of Greek expression with the deep fervour of a later faith and a personal emotion.

I.

Enfant, que je te porte envie !  
Ta barque neuve échoue au port.  
Qu'as-tu donc fait pour que ta vie  
Ait sitôt mérité la mort ?

II.

Entre au ciel. La porte est la tombe.  
Le sombre avenir des humains,  
Comme un jouet trop lourd qui tombe,  
S'échappe à tes petites mains.

III.

Qu'est devenu l'enfant ? La mère  
Pleure, et l'oiseau rit, chantre ailé.  
La mère croit qu'il est sous terre,  
L'oiseau sait qu'il s'est envolé.

After these any reader might expect that the next poem following must seem at least to fall off in perfection of pathos or in simplicity of sweetness. But the next poem following is this.

Aucune aile ici-bas n'est pour longtemps posée.  
Quand elle était petite, elle avait un oiseau;  
Elle le nourrissait de pain et de rosée  
Et veillait sur son nid comme sur un berceau.  
Un soir il s'échappa. Que de plaintes amères !  
Dans mes bras en pleurant je la vis accourir. . . .  
Jeunes filles, laissez, laissez, ô jeunes mères,  
Les oiseaux s'envoler et les enfants mourir !

C'est une loi d'en haut qui veut que tout nous quitte ;  
Le secret du Seigneur, nous le saurons un jour.  
Elle grandit. La vie, hélas ! marche si vite !  
Elle eut un doux enfant, un bel ange, un amour.

Une nuit, triste sort des choses éphémères !  
 Cet enfant s'éteignit, sans pleurer, sans souffrir. . . .  
 Jeunes filles, laissez, laissez, ô jeunes mères,  
 Les oiseaux s'envoler et les enfants mourir !

For all future readers the pathetic impression of this exquisite lyrical elegy will be heightened by consideration of its date—one year and seventy-three days before that of the catastrophe which darkened for so long the life of the writer, and at last inspired the most fervent, the most profound, and the most sublime poems that ever gave late relief and imperishable expression to the sorrow of a great poet and a bereaved father.

But this greatest of elegiac poets was no less great—we might say that out of his infinite condescension he deigned to show himself no less great—as a gnomic or didactic poet of the simplest and homeliest morality. The brief rebuke addressed to those who think it no sin or shame to indulge in small habitual transgressions or evasions of the lofty law and the rigid rule of honour has a grandeur of its own which fits it for a place between two faultless lyrics. Its lesson of uprightness and noble purity is conveyed in language of a simplicity as limpid as the spirit of its teaching is sublime.

Qu'est-ce que l'océan ? une onde après une onde.

\* \* \* \* \*

Homme, la conscience est une minutie.  
 L'âme est plus aisément que l'hermine, noircie.  
 L'aube sans s'amoindrir toujours partout entra.  
 Ne crois pas que jamais, parce qu'on les mettra  
 Dans les moindres recoins de l'âme, on rapetisse  
 La probité, l'honneur le droit et la justice.

From the lines addressed to one of his most faithful friends I take the following three in example of the serene wisdom which the writer had gathered from experience of chequered fortunes and of recurrent animosities.

Aux éblouissements de l'aube je calcule  
La morne hostilité qu'aura le crépuscule.  
*Qui ne fut point hai n'a vécu qu'à demi.*

Here, as in almost all Victor Hugo's various books of verse, the tragic visionary of the *Contemplations* alternately succeeds and gives place to the preacher of trust and hope, the apostle of love and charity.

Tous vont cherchant, aucun ne trouve.  
Le ciel semble à leur désespoir  
Noir comme l'ancre d'une louve,  
Au fond d'un bois, l'hiver, le soir.

Où vont-ils ? vers la même porte.  
Que sont-ils ? les flots d'un torrent.  
Que disent-ils ? la nuit l'emporte.  
Que font-ils ? la tombe le prend.

Another note of equally noble sadness is struck in the melodious lines which half deplore the transiency of sorrow.

L'homme que le chagrin ne peut longtemps plier  
Passe ; tout nous est bon, hélas ! pour oublier ;  
La contemplation berce, apaise et console ;  
Le cœur laisse, emporté par l'aile qui l'isole,  
Tomber les souvenirs en montant dans l'azur ;  
Le tombeau le plus cher n'est plus qu'un point obscur.



Ceux qui vivent chantant, riant sans fin ni trêve,  
 Ont bien vite enterré leurs morts ; celui qui rêve  
 N'est pas un meilleur vase à conserver le deuil.  
 La nature emplit l'âme en éblouissant l'œil ;  
 Et l'araignée oublie, quand elle tend sa toile,  
 D'un bout l'attache à l'homme et de l'autre à l'étoile.

No poem of Victor Hugo's is a finer example of that vivid and intense imagination which makes the world of vision seem wellnigh tangible and palpable than that which records the strange grim dream of the great stone lions in the wilderness.

Étaient-ce des rochers ? Étaient-ce des fantômes ?  
 Peut-être avaient-ils vu tomber bien des royaumes.

The supernatural realism of the whole vision surpasses the most imaginative work of Shelley and recalls the most imaginative work of Coleridge.

But it is impossible even to indicate more than a thousandth part of the treasure contained in these seven books. The poems of meditation and depression, aspiration and faith, touch again on keys of thought and feeling often touched before, but never without striking some new note. From these I quote but one more stanza, to which even the author has left us few that are superior, if hundreds upon hundreds that are equal.

L'ancre est un poids qui rompt le câble.  
 Tout est promis, rien n'est tenu.  
 Serait-ce donc que l'implacable  
 Est un des noms de l'inconnu ?  
 Quel est donc ce maître farouche  
 Qui pour la toile fait la mouche,

L'orageux cheval pour le mors,  
Tous les escaliers pour descendre,  
Oui pour non, le feu pour la cendre,  
La mémoire pour le remords ?

The brighter and lighter poems of this many-voiced and many-coloured book are not less full of spontaneous grace and native strength than those which deal with matter of meditation or of mourning. All the joy of a great poet in his art, all the pleasure of a great artist in his work, find utterance here and there in it : as likewise does all the scorn of a great man for pedants, of a good man for unbelievers in goodness.

Definitions : Mesdames  
Et messieurs, l'ancien bon goût,  
C'est l'âne ayant charge d'âmes,  
C'est Rien grand prêtre de Tout.

C'est bête sans être fauve,  
C'est prêcher sans enseigner,  
C'est Phoebus devenu chauve,  
Qui tâche de se peigner.

Such notes as these give new life and variety to the inexhaustible concert which includes also the majestic lines on the reason for the sufferings of great men, the superb allegory on the danger of spiritual high places, and the noble elegy—now at last restored to circulation—on the death of Théophile Gautier.

Any student would at once recognize the author of the following four lines :—

La rosée inondait les fleurs à peine écloses ;  
Elles jouaient, riant de leur rire sans fiel.  
Deux choses ici-bas vont bien avec les roses,  
Le rire des enfants et les larmes du ciel.

Among the many personal poems here collected and arranged with admirable care and taste I venture to select as especially notable and noble the lines addressed to two friends of the writer who were at enmity with each other ; presumably, if I may conjecture, from the indications given or suggested in the poem, Alexandre Dumas and Jules Janin. But the lyrical elegy on Mme Gay de Girardin, though it cannot be more loftily pathetic or more tenderly impressive than this appeal of an exile to be allowed the pleasure of reconciling friends at variance—and at home, is more remarkable for the magnificent fascination of its metrical quality.

Paix à vous, bon cœur utile,  
 Beaux yeux clos,  
 Esprit splendide et fertile !  
 Elle aimait ma petite île,  
 Mes grands flots,

Ces champs de trèfle et de seigle,  
 Ce doux sol,  
 L'océan que l'astre règle,  
 Et mon noir rocher, où l'aigle  
 Prend son vol.

\* \* \* \*

Dieu, c'est la nuit que tu sèmes  
 En créant  
 Les hommes, ces noirs problèmes ;  
 Nous sommes les masques blêmes  
 Du néant ;

Nous sommes l'algue et la houle,  
 O semeur !  
 Nous flottons ; le vent nous roule ;  
 Toute notre œuvre s'écroule  
 En rumeur.

\* \* \* \*

Pendant qu'assis sous les branches,  
 Nous pleurons,  
 Âme, tu souris, tu penches  
 Tes deux grandes ailes blanches  
 Sur nos fronts.

\* \* \* \*

Dieu, là, dans ce sombre monde,  
 Met l'amour,  
 Et tous les ports dans cette onde,  
 Et dans cette ombre profonde  
 Tout le jour.

O vivants qui dans la brume,  
 Dans le deuil,  
 Passez comme un flot qui fume  
 Et n'êtes que de l'écume  
 Sur l'écueil,

Vivez dans les clartés fausses,  
 Expiez !  
 Moi, Dieu bon qui nous exauce !  
 Je sens remuer les fosses  
 Sous mes pieds.

Il est temps que je m'en aille  
 Loin du bruit,  
 Sous la ronce et la broussaille,  
 Retrouver ce qui tressaille  
 Dans la nuit.

Tous mes nœuds dans le mystère  
 Sont dissous.  
 L'ombre est ma patrie austère.  
 J'ai moins d'amis sur la terre  
 Que dessous.

Among more poems of similar if not equal beauty, that which describes the author's visit to Jersey, twenty years after his first arrival, seems to me to stand out as though invested with a special sublimity of pathos. The sweetness of the shore, the splendour of the sea, the fragrance of the heather, the grandeur of the cliffs 'que l'onde ignore et ronge,' the glory and the beauty of cloud and flower, of wind and foam, all serve as heralds to the closing thought—

Et combien vivaient, qui sont morts !

It was supposed that Hugo, like Landor, had never written—had perhaps vowed never to write—a sonnet ; but the one headed *Ave, Dea ; moriturus te salutat*, may be ranked among the grandest and most graceful in the world. The three which find place in a later division of the book are perhaps unique in their fusion of poetry with irony and humour with imagination : but this one is perfect in its sweet and serious union of courtesy with melancholy.

Nous sommes tous les deux voisins du ciel, madame,  
Puisque vous êtes belle et puisque je suis vieux.

But the verses on dawn in a churchyard strike perhaps even a finer note in the same key of thought ; and those written as it were in aspiring anticipation of death have in them even a deeper and loftier music than these.

The sixth section of this book has something in it of the *Contemplations*, but more of the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* ; and in strength and in grace of expression and of thought it is worthy of comparison with either. The 'roman en trois sonnets' is perhaps even finer in

talists might condemn as sensual. The noble and simple treatment of natural passion or instinct, impossible alike to the grovelling bigot and to the grovelling libertine, may evoke frowns on the one hand and sneers on the other: for neither can be expected to appreciate the spirit and the sense of such lines as these.

Sa tendre obéissance était haute et sereine ;  
Elle savait se faire esclave et rester reine,  
Suprême grâce ! et quoi de plus inattendu  
Que d'avoir tout donné sans avoir rien perdu !

\* \* \* \* \*

Elle vous caressait avec de la lumière ;  
La nudité des pieds fait la marche plus fière  
Chez ces êtres pétris d'idéale beauté ;  
Il lui venait dans l'ombre au front une clarté  
Pareille à la nocturne auréole des pôles ;  
À travers les baisers, de ses blanches épaules  
On croyait voir sortir deux ailes lentement ;  
Son regard était bleu, d'un bleu de firmament ;  
Et c'était la grandeur de cette femme étrange  
Qu'en cessant d'être vierge elle devenait ange.

And the grace and the charm of these equally divine and human verses are not more wonderful or more perfect than the grace of expression and the charm of humour which animate the more fanciful poems expressive of boyish impulse or of dreamy adolescence. Even the delightful record of the infantine couple who alighted at the Holly-tree Inn and made it immortal is not more delightful—or more lamentable in its catastrophe—than this most perfect little poem.

J'atteignais l'âge austère où l'on est fort en thème,  
Où l'on cherche, enivré d'on ne sait quel parfum,  
Afin de pouvoir dire éperdûment : Je t'aime !

Que'qu'un.

J'entrais dans ma treizième année. O feuilles vertes !  
Jardins ! croissance obscure et douce du printemps !  
Et j'aimais Hermina, dans l'ombre. Elle avait, certes,  
Huit ans.

Parfois, bien qu'elle fût à jouer occupée,  
J'allais, muet, m'asseoir près d'elle, avec ferveur,  
Et je la regardais regarder sa poupée,  
Rêveur.

Il est une heure étrange où l'on sent l'âme naître ;  
Un jour, j'eus comme un chant d'aurore au fond du cœur.  
Soit, pensai-je, avançons, parlons ! c'est l'instant d'être  
Vainqueur !

Je pris un air profond, et je lui dis :—Minette,  
Unissons nos destins. Je demande ta main.—  
Elle me répondit par cette pichenette :  
—Gamin !

Such is life—as Mrs. Harris long since observed ;  
but happily it is not likewise 'the end of all things.' In  
the next lyric the lover has wellnigh come to years of  
indiscretion : but the perfect and wonderful mastery of  
verse which does into words the emotion of this only  
less innocent intrigue is no less evident in every line and  
in the turn of every stanza.

J'étais le songeur qui pense,  
Elle était l'oiseau qui fuit ;  
Je l'adorais en silence,  
Elle m'aimait à grand bruit.

Quand dans quelque haute sphère  
Je croyais planer vainqueur,  
Je l'entendais en bas faire  
Du vacarme dans mon cœur.

Mais je reprenais mon songe  
 Et je l'adorais toujours,  
 Crédule au divin mensonge  
 Des roses et des amours.

Les profondeurs constellées,  
 L'aube, la lune qui naît,  
 Amour, me semblaient mêlées  
 Aux rubans de son bonnet.

If ever there should seem—I do not say that there ever seems to me—to be any touch of monotony or any tediousness of repetition in the innumerable studies of early love or adolescent fancy which we owe to the retrospective or imaginative author of *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, there is certainly no deduction of the kind to be made from the enjoyment with which all fit and competent readers must receive any fresh instalment of his no less innumerable studies after nature—of such, more especially, as this one, taken

Dans les ravins où mai plein de roses abonde.  
 Là les papillons blancs et les papillons bleus,  
 Ainsi que le divin se mêle aux fabuleux,  
 Vont et viennent, croisant leurs essors gais et lestes,  
 Si bien qu'on les prendrait pour des lueurs célestes.

\* \* \* \* \*

J'aime la vision de ces réalités ;  
 La vie aux yeux sereins luit de tous les côtés ;  
 La chanson des forêts est d'une douceur telle  
 Que, si Phébus l'entend quand, rêveur, il dételle  
 Ses chevaux las souvent au point de haleter,  
 Il s'arrête, et fait signe aux muses d'écouter.

English readers will be reminded by the following extract of one of Mr. Browning's most perfect and pathetic minor poems.



Cela la désennuie : elle vit toute seule,  
Elle est pauvre et travaille, elle n'est pas bégueule ;  
Elle échange de loin, et pour se reposer,  
Un regard, et parfois, de la main, un baiser  
Avec un voisin, seul aussi dans sa mansarde.  
Et c'est étrange comme un baiser qu'on hasarde  
Sait son chemin, et comme il a le don vainqueur  
De partir de la bouche et d'arriver au cœur.

\* \* \* \* \*

Et peut-être jamais ne se parlera-t-on.  
Car l'amour ébauché quelquefois se prolonge  
Dans la nuée au point de finir par un songe,  
Et souvent, au moment où l'on croyait tenir  
Une espérance, on voit que c'est un souvenir.

It seems irreverent and stupid to select and to curtail, to omit and to prefer, when dealing with such poems as these ; but no one could venture to mutilate by partial citation the following divine verses.

CE QUE DIT CELLE QUI N'A PAS PARLÉ.

L'énigme ne dit pas son mot ;  
Les flèches d'or ont des piqures  
Dont on ne parle pas tout haut ;  
Souvent, sous les branches obscures,

Plus d'un tendre oiseau se perdit.  
Vous m'avez souvent dit : je t'aime }  
Et je ne vous l'ai jamais dit.  
Vous prodiguiez le cri suprême,

Je refusais l'aveu profond.  
Le lac bleu sous la lune rêve,  
Et, muet, dans la nuit se fond.  
L'eau se tait quand l'astre se lève.

L'avez-vous donc trouvé mauvais ?  
En se taisant le cœur se creuse,  
Et, quand vous étiez là, j'avais  
Le doux tremblement d'être heureuse.

Vous parliez trop, moi pas assez.  
L'amour commence par de l'ombre ;  
Les nids, du grand jour sont blessés ;  
Les choses ont leur pudeur sombre.

Aujourd'hui—comme, au vent du soir,  
L'arbre tristement se balance !—  
Vous me quittez, n'ayant pu voir  
Mon âme à travers mon silence.

Soit ! nous allons nous séparer.  
—Oh ! comme la forêt soupire !—  
Demain qui me verra pleurer  
Peut-être vous verra sourire.

Ce doux mot qu'il faut effacer  
—Je t'aime—aujourd'hui me déchire.  
Vous le disiez sans le penser,  
Moi je le pensais sans le dire.

A more absolutely perfect piece of work than that was never wrought by human hand. Its tender simplicity, its translucent depth of pathos, its sweetness and its truthfulness, may be felt on a first reading ; but its marvellous quality of execution, the subtle magic of its style, the incomparable and instinctive choice of phrase which makes a miracle of every line, can only and can hardly be appreciated in full after longer and more loving study than any but the masterpieces of lyric poetry deserve and require and reward.

The fancy and the melody, the grace of form and the freshness of feeling, which distinguish the ten poems following on this one, bear evidence for the thousandth time to the exuberance of inspiration, the inexhaustible and joyous energy of song, perceptible alike in the latest and in the earliest work of Victor Hugo. Like the kings of painting, he can make of the commonest model an angelic or a queenly figure without the least transgression of fidelity to truth. The touches of romantic or imaginative suggestion which relieve the realism of his studies do not impair the lifelike simplicity of their general effect. Musset could no more have given such nobility of tone to the sketch of a girl than could Béranger; yet no Lisette or Mimi Pinson is more actually alive than the Thérèse whom a greater poet has glorified and transfigured by such verses as these.

Quel destin traversera-t-elle?  
 Quelle ivresse? quelle douleur?  
 Elle n'en sait rien; cette belle  
 Rit, et se coiffe d'une fleur.

\* \* \* \*

Elle s'ébat comme les cygnes;  
 Et sa chevelure et sa voix  
 Et son sourire seraient dignes  
 De la fauve grandeur des bois.

But at every leaf we turn we come upon some passage of beauty as rare as this; the eye is caught again, the attention is solicited anew, by some equally magnificent or lovely touch of genius.

Aux instants où les cœurs se parlent sans rien dire,  
 Il voyait s'éclairer de pudeur et d'amour,  
 Comme une eau qui reflète un ciel d'ombre et de jour,

Ton visage pensif, tour à tour pâle et rose ;  
 Et souvent il sentait, ô la divine chose !  
 Dans ce doux abandon, des anges seuls connu,  
 Se poser sur son pied ton pied charmant et nu.

From the radiant *Idylle de Floriane* I venture to take two jewels for sample of all contained in the seven golden caskets of this poem.

Les bleuets la trouvaient belle ;  
 L'air vibrait ; il est certain  
 Qu'on était fort épris d'elle  
 Dans le trèfle et dans le thym.

\* \* \* \*

Comme elle était familière  
 Avec les bois d'ombre emplis !  
 —Pardieu, disait un vieux lierre,  
 Je l'ai vue autrefois lys !

It is impossible to say whether the matchless grace of touch and the living impulse of melody common to all these poems alike are more evident in such lighter notes as these or in the graver music of such stanzas as the following.

Là, le soir, à l'heure où tout penche,  
 Où Dieu bénit,  
 Où la feuille baise la branche,  
 L'aile le nid,

Tous ces objets saints qui nous virent  
 Dans nos beaux jours,  
 Et qui, tout palpitants, soupirent  
 De nos amours,

Tous les chers hôtes du bois sombre,  
Pensifs et doux,  
Avant de s'endormir, dans l'ombre,  
Parlent de nous.

That the poems dealing with the passion or even with the fancy or the vision of love which belong to the later years of the life of Victor Hugo are more vivid and fervent in their treatment of the subject chosen or their translation of the feeling expressed than the contemplative and elegiac verses of his youth, or even of his earlier manhood and middle age, is a fact which no student can possibly overlook, or can rationally refuse to accept as singular and suggestive. Many remarks might be made on it, and many inferences might be drawn from it; but to me it seems simply a proof of the truth that the force of imagination and the power of expression must needs increase and grow up together, as in Shakespeare's case they so evidently did, whether or not the more ardent and actual passions or emotions of the writer may survive or may subside. But in any case no more enchanting and superb submission to the advance of time was ever made, or was ever cast into sweeter notes of sighing or laughing music, than in the divine levity and the smiling resignation of these three stanzas.

Horace, et toi, vieux La Fontaine,  
Vous avez dit : Il est un jour  
Où le cœur qui palpite à peine  
Sent comme une chanson lointaine  
Mourir la joie et fuir l'amour.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I cannot refrain from the observation that they never can have said that: for the poet who could do so even now would be the equal—would have caught the spirit and echoed the voice—of Victor Hugo. The

O poètes, l'amour réclame  
 Quand vous dites : ' Nous n'aimons plus,  
 Nous pleurons, nous n'avons plus d'âme,  
 Nous cachons dans nos cœurs sans flamme  
 Cupidon goutteux et perclus.'

Le temps d'aimer jamais ne passe ;  
 Non, jamais le cœur n'est fermé !  
 Hélas ! vieux Jean, ce qui s'efface,  
 Ce qui s'en va, mon doux Horace,  
 C'est le temps où l'on est aimé.

To some, perhaps to many students of the greatest poet of our age, the seventh division of this book will give yet keener and more various delight than all the rest. All will rejoice in the gift of a third echo song as perfect and as brilliant in its music as the jester's song in *Cromwell* and even as *La Chasse du Burgrave* itself. Gautier observed long since that the mastery of the master's hand, its instinctive touch of the right note, was as infallible and as exquisite in such metrical sports and whimsies as in the gravest and the loftiest forms of verse. The last two stanzas of *La Blanche Aminte* would suffice to prove it.

Longtemps le sérail infidèle  
 D'elle  
 Parla, puis de ses cheveux blonds  
 Longs,

cynical resignation of the courtier who felt that ' he had had his share of fun, his share of eating and drinking, and now it was time for him to take himself off,' never cast itself into such music ; and the childlike simplicity of the immortal fabulist, whom all children not ignorant of his charm will always love and laugh with, never struck so full a chord or touched so deep a note as this.

Les blanches qu'à Chypre on rencontre  
 Contre,  
 Et les noires de Visapour  
 Pour.

And from *Le Prince Fainéant*, at the first opening of his lazy lips, we get a fresh echo of the swelling and rolling music, dancing like a wave and ringing like a trumpet, which fired all hearts and took all ears with rapture, now sixty years ago, in *Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*.

But the next poem has no parallel that I can remember in all the vast and various universe of poetry created by the *fiat lux* of Victor Hugo. The radiant loveliness of every detail serves to intensify and vivify the suggestive darkness of the close. Never was the beauty of jewels so delicately rendered into gemlike words as here.

Que fait l'orfèvre ? Il achève  
 Quelque anneau mystérieux.  
 Sa boutique semble un rêve  
 Qu'emplissent de vagues yeux ;

L'opale est une prunelle,  
 La turquoise est un regard ;  
 La flamme tremble éternelle  
 Dans l'œil du rubis hagard.

L'émeraude en sa facette  
 Cache une ondine au front clair ;  
 La vicomtesse de Cette  
 Avait les yeux verts de mer.

Le diamant sous son voile  
Rêve, des cieux ébloui ;  
Il regarde tant l'étoile  
Que l'étoile entre dans lui.

L'ambre est une larme austère ;  
Le saphir au chaste feu  
Est devenu bleu sous terre  
Tant il a contemplé Dieu.

Une femme chez l'orfèvre  
Entre, sourire éclatant ;  
Les paroles sur sa lèvre  
Battent de l'aile en chantant.

Elle porte un châle à palmes,  
Un chapeau rose charmant ;  
Autour de ses grands yeux calmes  
Tout frissonne doucement.

Elle brille et jase, et semble  
Lueur, parfum, colibri ;  
Si belle que le cœur tremble,  
S'étonne, et cherche un abri.

Où va-t-elle ? d'où sort-elle ?  
D'où sort l'aube ? où va le jour ?  
Elle est la joie, étincelle  
De cette flamme, l'amour.

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Elle choisit chez l'orfèvre  
Tous les beaux bijoux tremblants ;  
Et l'or semble avoir la fièvre  
Entre ces petits doigts blancs.



Elle prend tout, la pirate ;  
L'aigue, sœur des gouttes d'eau,  
Les agates de Surate  
Et les émaux du Lido,

Et la parure complète  
De sardoine et de béryl.  
Elle éclate à chaque emplette  
D'un doux rire puéril.

La perle voit cette belle.  
Pourquoi fuir, perle au doux front ?  
—J'aime mieux la mer, dit-elle ;  
C'est moins sombre et moins profond.

The little poem addressed to a little Chinese beauty is a most exquisite example of the poet's lighter style, sweet and bright and flawless as the most perfect work of Chinese or Japanese art ; but the date appended gives a tragic and historic association to the nativity of this radiant little child of song which must leave the reader amazed at the wild and incongruous caprices of inexplicable chance.

Vierge du pays du thé,  
Dans ton beau rêve enchanté  
Le ciel est une cité  
Dont la Chine est la banlieue.

Dans notre Paris obscur  
Tu cherches, fille au front pur,  
Tes jardins d'or et d'azur  
Où le paon ouvre sa queue ;

Et tu souris à nos cieux.  
A ton âge un nain joyeux  
Sur la faïence des yeux  
Peint l'innocence, fleur bleue.

These lines were written by Victor Hugo on the 1st of December 1851.

This seventh casket contains twenty-four more jewels of incomparable verse ; but only one or two can here be offered as samples of its many-coloured treasure. The lines to a rat feeding on the litter of worthless books and the rubbish of rotting reviews are as full of brilliant life and spontaneous grace as of that vivid wit which is the splendour of good sense.

Rat, tu soupes et tu déjeunes  
Avec des romans refroidis,  
Des vers morts, et des quatrains jeunes  
Jadis.

O rat, tu ronges et tu songes !  
Tu mâches dans ton galetas  
Les vieux dogmes et les vieux songes  
En tas.

C'est pour toi qui gaîment les fêtes  
Qu'écrivent les bons Patouillets ;  
C'est pour toi que les gens sont bêtes  
Et laids.

Rat, c'est pour toi qui les dissèques  
Que les sonnets et les sermons  
Disent dans les bibliothèques :  
Dormons !

The brightness and beauty, the wit and truth and humour, of the tiny lyrical comedies—'comédies injouables qui se jouent sans cesse'—which compose the tenth subdivision of this seventh book would suffice to make the writer's name immortal in the memory of all who know poetry or nature when they see it. But the set

of eleven songs with which the book winds up, and the seventh string of the lyre leaves the sense of its final vibration in our ears, could only be described by a hand which could rival the description of the jewels so lately cited. The loyal love of Spain which never ceased to animate the recollection of the great poet whose boyhood had been fostered in the country of the Cid gives a sort of personal charm to the splendid simplicity of these unsurpassable sixteen lines.

J'avais une bague, une bague d'or,  
Et je l'ai perdue hier dans la ville ;  
Je suis pandériste et toréador,  
Guitare à Grenade, épée à Séville.

Mon anneau luit plus que l'astre vermeil ;  
Le diable, caché dans l'œil de ma brune,  
Pourrait seul produire un bijou pareil  
S'il faisait un jour un trou dans la lune.

Si vous retrouvez l'anneau n'importe où,  
Rapportez-le-moi. C'est Gil qu'on me nomme.  
Certes, je vaux peu ; je ne suis qu'un sou,  
Mais près d'un liard je suis gentilhomme.

Je n'ai que mon chant comme le moineau.  
Rendez-moi ma bague, et que Dieu vous paie !  
Vous connaissez Jeanne ? Eh bien, cet anneau,  
C'est, avec son cœur, le seul or que j'aie.

Between this and the last song I propose to transcribe in full comes one 'whose lightness and brightness doth shine in such splendour' as Béranger at his lightest and Musset at his brightest could not match ; but 'the ghost's song' which follows it recalls while it eclipses the loftier

lyrical achievements and the nobler poetic names of Francis Beaumont and John Webster.

Qui donc êtes-vous, la belle ?  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Une vierge était chez nous ;  
Ses yeux étaient ses bijoux.  
Je suis la vierge, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous êtes en blanc, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
En gardant les grands bœufs roux,  
Claude lui fit les yeux doux.  
Je suis la fille, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous portez des fleurs, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Les vents et les cœurs sont fous ;  
Un baiser les fit époux.  
Je suis l'amante, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous avez pleuré, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Elle eut un fils, prions tous,  
Dieu le prit sur ses genoux.  
Je suis la mère, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous êtes pâle, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Elle s'enfuit dans les trous,  
Sinistre, avec les hiboux.  
Je suis la folle, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous avez bien froid, la belle ;  
 Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
 Les amours et les yeux doux  
 De nos cerceûls sont les clous.  
 Je suis la morte, dit-elle.  
 Cueillez la branche de houx.

The simple and natural tragedy of a star-crossed life was never before done into words and set to music so divine. The 'biers of hazel grey' with which the 'many widows' of Chevy Chase 'came to fetch their makes away' were less tragic than the hazel-bough which bears the burden of these six stanzas.

That the song of the envious cynic which jingles so bitter and venomous a tune of hatred and malice as might once more have excited the raging envy of a Planche or a Sainte-Beuve should have fallen in faultless verse from the same hand which wrote the sweetest and noblest lyric poems of our age—which could write even such a poem as the last here transcribed—is but one more sign that the infinite variety of the writer's creative or representative genius was as inexhaustible as the dramatic energy of his interest in human instinct or in human character.

Le destin, ce dieu sans tête  
 Et bête,  
 A fait l'animal  
 Fort mal,

Il fit d'une fange immonde  
 Le monde,  
 Et d'un fiel amer  
 La mer.

Tout se tient par une chaîne  
 De haine ;  
 On voit dans les fleurs  
 Des pleurs.

If the whole soul of pessimism, pious or impious, is not there condensed and spiritualized, it is surely in quint-essence here.

Homme, mon frère, nous sommes  
 Deux hommes,  
 Et, pleins de venins,  
 Deux nains.

Ton désir secret concerte  
 Ma perte,  
 Et mon noir souhait  
 Te hait ;

Car ce globe où la mer tremble  
 Nous semble  
 Pour notre appétit  
 Petit.

Nous manquons, sur sa surface,  
 De place  
 Pour notre néant  
 Géant.

The satire conveyed in such lyric or dramatic form as this will probably seem to most readers more effective in expression, and worthier of the greatest poet of his country and our century, than the elaborate and monotonous invective of the supplementary section. The two songs of Gavroche are delightful beyond all praise ; but the brutal, treacherous, apathetic and selfish Englishman must be excused if he declines—in common with the

thankless and trustless Italian—to accept that young citizen as an ideal President of the United States of Europe. And much of his creator's rhetoric, in the eighth division of this book, might plausibly if not fairly be described, by readers neither unfriendly nor irreverent, as pure and mere Gavrocherie. They who did not hesitate, during the lifetime of the man whom they loyally acknowledged as the greatest writer of their century, to express their dissent, in graver or lighter tones of commentary, from such of his views as seemed to them questionable, or such of his theories as seemed to them untenable, have a right to speak—if indeed they are not bound to speak—as plainly and as frankly as they would have spoken in former years with perfect confidence and assured conviction that such plain speaking would not have been taken amiss by the one man who might have felt a right to object to it—had he been himself less straightforward and less upright.

That there are splendid and sonorous verses in this eighth book—that the reader comes upon such verses at every turn—it cannot be necessary to say. But the perpetual, the incessant inspiration which he will recognize in every other province of the poet's work, he will not recognize here: if he fancies that he does, he is misled by the superstition of confidence or infected by the fever of sympathy. The hopeless, ineradicable, inextinguishable superstition which inspires Frenchmen with the faith that what would be damnable in Englishmen or Germans or Italians is divine in Frenchmen was never more nakedly exposed and was never so magnificently expressed. What the French call *chauvinisme*, and the Russo-Radical faction in England

was wont to designate by the elegant term of 'jingoism,' is no doubt the obverse of a noble quality : but the untempered vehemence of its expression is apt to alloy the purity and impair the force of poetic style. And I can hardly hope that any more competent critic of our greatest contemporary writer than I can pretend to be would disagree with my diffident and reluctant conclusion that no later work of Victor Hugo's, written on the same lines or in the same temper, can reasonably be set beside the *Châtiments*. The record of *L'Année Terrible*, as I have elsewhere endeavoured to certify at some laborious length, is full of unflagging energy and unfading beauty : but its poetic beauties are fainter and its poetic energies less fervent than those displayed in the former volume of epic and lyric satire. And to me at least I must honestly admit that these posthumous poems of a political or polemical order seem as inferior to the average level of those contained in *L'Année Terrible* as was theirs to that of the hundred which compose the muster of the *Châtiments*. The finest in executive effect is the feeblest in its hold upon history and the faultiest in its relation to fact. That the mock martyrs of Manchester should not have been elevated to the dignity of death by hanging in retribution for homicide—that it would have been wiser to spare their forfeit lives as worthless except to the crew who might make use of their execution as serviceable material in the pinchbeck structure of Hibernian fiction and the pasteboard outworks of Hibernian faction—I have no more doubt now than I had at the time ; but I must confess to a conviction that the right word on the matter was not said by Victor Hugo—nor, perhaps, by the humbler voice which antici-



pated his in appeal against the sentence which gave to three common homicides the chance of a posthumous position as pseudo-martyrs. The brief and admirable words in which Mr. Bright summed up the reasons against hanging those homicides may not be as unanswerable as they seem to me; but they are unquestionably weightier and graver than the appeal or the protest put forward by any other pleader in that cause. To some more or less inappropriate extravagance of expression in my own hasty lines on the subject I might not be unwilling to plead guilty; but I must also plead that Victor Hugo's exceed them hardly more—though that excess be wellnigh beyond all measure of criticism—in poetical value than in political extravagance and in imaginative injustice. Paul de Saint-Victor, in his beautiful and noble book on Victor Hugo, has noted what he disagreed with and disapproved of in the great master's too eager and single-hearted advocacy of every sufferer's cause—for instance, in the course of his merciful and magnanimous pleading on behalf of the ruffians and reptiles of the Commune: I may perhaps claim an equal right to express my loyal and reverential dissent from what seems to me irrational or inequitable in the expression of his views or the application of his principles.

It might be too much to say that the lyre of this great lyrist would not have suffered by the snapping of this additional or supplementary 'string of brass'; but I cannot pretend to think it would have suffered much. The raging resolution of the average Frenchman to see nothing so sacred as the immediate advantage or convenience of Frenchmen—nothing hollow in the most sonorous protestations of brotherly unselfishness when

illustrated by the most glaring evidence of disloyalty and greed—nothing ludicrous in the attribution of these qualities to all their well-wishers who do not prefer French claims and French interests to those of their own country—is of all possible national qualities the one most certain to disgust all neutrals and alienate all friends. It is unnecessary for any one, and for me it would be hardly less painful than unseemly, to insist on the too copious evidence of support and encouragement given by the most illustrious of all Frenchmen to the fatally and perversely illogical pretensions of the nation which professes a belief in equality—on the understanding that none of all equally inferior nations is to claim equality with France, and in retributive justice—on condition that Frenchmen are to be exempt from the operation of its plainest laws.

But these, after all, however serious in themselves, are temporary and minor considerations in comparison with the eternal value, the indisputable importance, of an addition to the best creative literature, to the rarest intellectual inheritance, to the highest poetic possessions of the world. And that such an addition has been bequeathed to us by the author of this book will be disputed by no man whose 'spirit of sense' is not 'hard as the palm of ploughman,' and duller 'than the fat weed that roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf' to the perception or apprehension of what is most precious, most perfect, and most enduring, in the spiritual world of poetry.

## II.

1893.

IF the accusation of monotony or the charge of repetition brought against the greatest of lyric poets by the lazy malignity of envious dullness is as false and fatuous as it is common and easy, the same charge or accusation when brought against the most careful and conscientious of their commentators and exponents is inevitably more difficult to meet and to refute. At every fresh display of the same great qualities the same emotion must be evoked in any but the most torpid and thankless of imaginable readers; and the danger is but too obvious that it may not succeed in avoiding the same expression. Reiteration of plaudit and panegyric is more tedious, it may be feared, more wearisome and unwelcome to the average reader or hearer, than reiteration of invective and reviling. And yet, if a great gift is to be acknowledged at all, it can hardly be acknowledged without the common tribute of hackneyed gratitude and threadbare tautologies of praise. When the gift is alike in kind and in quality one with those before bestowed upon us as upon our fathers before us by the same inexhaustible prodigality of genius, we can but accept the legacy and affirm the fact

The poems chosen by their editors to compose the second and last series of the collection or selection entitled *Toute la Lyre* bear evidence in themselves of dates and moods as various as those comprised in any of the many which have preceded it. But the sign-manual, so to speak, of the same sovereign hand is recognizable—as how should it not be recognizable?—on every page. The majestic *Vision of the Mountains* might have found a place in the last series of the *Légende des Siècles*; the second and the sixth poem following, among the lighter but not less bitter effusions of personal and social satire which relieve the habitually passionate indignation of the author's polemical verse. And the landscapes in the second section must be hung in the chambers of our memory beside those which were first exhibited in the youth and early manhood of the artist.

The glories and the mysteries, the actions and the passions, of nature and of man have attracted and inspired all great poets, from Homer to Hugo and from Virgil to Tennyson, each one according to his birth-right, by common sympathy and impulse to various expression of particular experience in feeling and in thought: the mysteries of calculation, 'geometry, algebra, arithmetic,' were hitherto, I imagine, a field unploughed, a sea uncloven, by the share or by the prow of an adventurer in verse. This feat was reserved for the sovereign poet of the nineteenth century. Poets and mathematicians might both have been expected to object to the suggestion of such an attempt: but the former class at all events can only rejoice and wonder over the marvellous and magnificent result.

Et la science entière apparaît comme un ciel  
Lugubre, sans matière et cependant réel,  
N'acceptant point l'azur et rejetant la terre,  
Ayant pour clef le fait, le nombre pour mystère ;  
L'algèbre y luit ainsi qu'une sombre Vénus ;  
Et de ces absolus et de ces inconnus,  
De ces obscurités terribles, de ces vides,  
Les logarithmes sont les pléiades livides ;  
Et Franklin pâle y jette une clarté d'éclair,  
Et la comète y passe, et se nomme Képler.

Il est deux nuits, deux puits d'aveuglement, deux tables  
D'obscurité, sans fin, sans forme, épouvantables,  
L'algèbre, nuit de l'homme, et le ciel, nuit de Dieu ;  
Les siècles s'useraient à compter, hors du lieu,  
De l'espace, du temps, invisibles pilastres,  
Les chiffres dans une ombre et dans l'autre les astres !

A yet more characteristic passage may be cited from the next poem: for the sublimity of emotion is even more characteristic of Hugo's genius than the sublimity of contemplation. And in these verses he has undertaken to describe or to define the true lover of true wisdom.

Tandis qu'on ne sait quoi d'étrange et de farouche  
Surgit dans les berceaux, dans les tombeaux se couche,  
Tandis que l'ouragan souffle, et que par moment  
La vie universelle est un rugissement,  
Et qu'à d'autres moments tout n'est plus qu'une face  
De silence où le cri de l'abîme s'efface,  
Tandis que le flot roule à l'engloutissement,  
Que la livide mort court sous le firmament  
Distribuant le monde aux fléaux ses ministres,  
Que les astres hagards ont des levers sinistres,  
Et que tout semble craindre un lugubre abandon,  
Lui, tranquille, il dit : Paix, harmonie et pardon !

Among so many poems in which the various moods, tender and severe, meditative and passionate, of indignation and aspiration and charity and pity find always their fit and perfect expression, it is difficult to choose any for special comment or typical excerpt where all are so full of plastic life, shapeliness, and colour ; but at least we may be sure that even Victor Hugo never put more pathetic truthfulness into fewer words than these.

Il pleut, c'est la nuit, l'enfant dort.

—Enfant, debout ! Va-t'en à ton travail ! C'est l'heure.—

Triste, il part ; nul ne le défend,

Et le ciel effrayant qui sanglote et qui pleure

Glace de ses larmes l'enfant.

There is no better or finer example in *Æschylus* or in *Shakespeare* than this of 'the pathetic fallacy'—if a fallacy it be. But it would be a task as tedious and as hopeless as ever was imposed by *Venus* or any other sorceress upon *Psyche* or any other victim, to count all the new examples of old power, all the fresh instances of perennial beauty, supplied in these pages for the enjoyment and the bewilderment, the delight and wonder and perplexity of the dazzled judgment which at length is fain to abdicate the right or abjure the privilege of selection. At every turning of the leaf the student comes upon something that should be noticed and that must be treasured ; the satire on transatlantic civilization which proves the writer's affinity rather with such republicans as *Landor* than with such democrats as *Whitman* ; the bitter good-humour of the lines on the danger of saying even to yourself what you think of this man or that ; the wise and lovely verses on the wisdom of

lovers and little children; the nobly pathetic and characteristic letter of the first year of the poet's exile; studies of sea and sunset, utterances or effusions of anguish under bereavement and of heroism in hope; and again, studies from fancy or from memory of cynical or sentimental moods or meditations or impressions; the fierce humour of *Love's Blasphemy*, the sharp-edged and serious dramatic fun—a gift bequeathed to the poet's adopted son Auguste Vacquerie—of the delicious little dialogue which determines the choice of a loyal man between his mistress and his friend; and, lastly, the incomparable invitation into the showiest and noisiest booth of the modern fair—literary or dramatic, Norwegian or Parisian.

Mais vous vous rebiffez. C'est vieux jeu, l'idéal !  
On n'en veut plus. Il sied d'offrir pour tout régal  
Le sale et le cruel à la foule effrayée.

In the first series published of this magnificent poetic miscellany it could not but be observed and admitted that the polemical section was hardly up to the mark—at least, by no means up to the mark set by the illustrious writer himself in his earlier works on the same line. It is with even more pleasure than surprise that we must now congratulate the editors on having kept the best wine for the last course or dessert. The noblest poems among those headed *Les Années Funestes* (1852–1870) are worthy of a distinguished place in the deathless volume of 1853. Here is the great and terrible *Death of Saint-Arnaud*,<sup>1</sup> with its matchless and wonderful picture of a fleet under sail for battle.

<sup>1</sup> Not a posthumous or unpublished poem, by the way, as implied if not asserted on the title-page of the volume.

Le moment vint ; l'escadre appareilla ; les roues  
 Tournèrent ; par ce tas de voiles et de proues,  
 Dont l'âpre artillerie en vingt salves gronda,  
 L'infini se laissa violer. L'armada,  
 Formidable, penchant, prête à cracher le soufre,  
 Les gueules des canons sur les gueules du gouffre,  
 Nageant, polype humain, sur l'abîme béant,  
 Et, comme un noir poisson dans un filet géant,  
 Prenant l'ouragan sombre en ses mille cordages,  
 S'ébranla : dans ses flancs, les haches d'abordages,  
 Les sabres, les fusils, le lourd tromblon marin,  
 La fauve caronade aux ailerons d'airain,  
 Se heurtaient ; et, jetant de l'écume aux étoiles,  
 Et roulant dans ses plis des tempêtes de toiles,  
 Frégate, aviso, brick, brûlot, trois-ponts, steamer,  
 Le troupeau monstrueux couvrit la vaste mer.

It might have tasked and baffled Tintoretto or Veronese to compete with such painting as this on his most triumphant and gigantic canvas.

A fitting companion to this tragic poem is that on the massacre of Mentana. When, some little time after that villainous victory of pope and emperor over the nation which has always had yet more cause to curse the perfidy of France as a friend than even the atrocity of France as an enemy, the present writer had the honour to receive from Victor Hugo a copy of the tiny pamphlet which first gave to the world, in homely small print upon homely thin paper, this immortal gift of impassioned and thunder-bearing song, its cry of prophetic protest, its passion of godlike anger, its music of hope as inexhaustible in sorrow as indomitable as the sea, bore the message they must have borne to thousands



of comfort and confirmation in the faith proclaimed and maintained against all reproof of chance or disproof of evidence by 'the voice of Guernsey' in the darkest days of contemporary Europe.

The monotony with which, in a happier hour for us than for themselves, the pressmen of the French empire took courage to reproach its assailant, its denouncer, and its judge, is as various, as vivid, as full of changing life and colour and music, as the many-voiced monotony of the sea. From the days of Homer downward there has been no sweeter, no sublimer or more living picture of dawn than this one taken by a witness whom all the rapture and glory of the hour could not avail to distract from contemplation of the sufferings and the disgraces of the age.

- L'écume à tous les vents s'effare et se déchire  
Et vole, et l'on dirait que de ces flocons blancs  
Quelques-uns prennent vie et sont les goélands ;  
Le tumulte infini dans l'ombre au loin bégaille ;  
Et la légèreté des nuages égaie  
Toute cette farouche et fauve profondeur ;  
L'aube chantante joue avec le flot grondeur ;  
L'océan frais et pur se fronce aux rocs arides ;  
La jeunesse éternelle offre toutes ses rides ;  
L'innocent liseron, nourri de sel amer,  
Fleurit sous les blocs noirs du vieux mur de la mer ;  
Et la création semble une apothéose ;  
Comme un papillon donne un coup d'aile à la rose,  
Là-bas l'aigle de mer tourne autour du récif.

The fusion rather than contrast of sublimity with sweetness and immensity with grace which gives to the verse of

Victor Hugo its special seal and distinctive sign of peculiar inspiration is hardly even here more notable than in a thousand other passages : but where outside his work shall we find the like of it—or the shadow ?

Neither may we look elsewhere for anything like the finished and bitter simplicity of tragic humour which replies to the charge of perpetual repetition through the mouth of the criminal who is weary of hearing brought against him, with such tasteless and intolerant monotony of vehemence, the perpetual, undenied, and undeniable charge of parricide : or like the exquisite and terrible poem on Compiègne, which paints for us in such melodious brilliance not love but crime among the roses : the soft Virgilian eclogue in which tyranny plays on its flute the tune of amnesty : the fiery impeachment of French law, the fearful indictment of French civilization, humanity, and justice, in the poems on the cases of Rosalie Doise and Lesurque, on the miners of Aubin and the famine in Algeria.

The great closing poem is of a kind above and beyond commentary ; it must be read, re-read, and absorbed before a fit and full sense of its greatness can be adequately realized. The passionate splendour of contemplative indignation which makes of every stanza such a living and vibrating flame of persistent and insistent music as we sometimes are privileged to see and hear in the full charge shoreward of a strong and steady sea can only fail to appeal to the spirit and the sense of such casual trespassers and transgressors as come down to the seaside with a view to indulgence in cockney or in puritan indecencies : and such trespass or

transgression is happily less to be feared on the beach of a spiritual than on the beach of a material sea. But the marvellous, the matchless power of execution can hardly perhaps be appreciated except by practical artists or workers in verse. Execution, as Blake said and says, is the chariot of genius: and here is the very highest genius guiding the horses and swept forward in the chariot of its choice—at once Automedon and Achilles. Here are five hundred and sixty-four deathless lines of five syllables—a metrical form as far removed as any well could be from ordinary association with anything serious or sublime—cast into one hundred and forty-one stanzas of four verses apiece. No more rigid form of metrical oppression could be devised to subdue the soaring genius and provoke the indignant revolt of a Cowley, a Tupper, an Emerson, or a Whitman. There is no sort of effort after such ‘new music’ as may be attempted and has often been attained in the music-halls of a ‘new poetry’ by the smashing of keys or the snapping of harpstrings, in humble if immodest emulation of such oldworld innovators as Fraunce and Stanihurst, who in the age of Spenser and Shakespeare were the songless and earless representatives of that hoariest of impostures so perpetually self-advertised with such immortality of impudence as an artistic novelty or an æsthetic revolution. But there is something which these liberators have somehow failed to attain: there is the sublime liberty of expression, the supreme perfection of utterance, which never has been and never will be attained except by workmen in words (as by workmen in any other more or less plastic material) who

can understand, accept, embrace, and rejoice in the rules and the conditions of their art: content in the recognition and happy in the acceptance of that immortal and immutable instinct whose impulse is for law, whose passion is for harmony, and whose service is perfect freedom.